

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Over a year ago, Generation Equality launched with the goal of enacting transformative change towards the achievement of gender equality by 2030 with girls and youth at the forefront of this new movement. Over the past twelve months, significant work has been made to achieve Generation Equality; such as the announcement of Action Coalition themes and leadership, process for civil society engagement, and concepts for strategic gatherings in Mexico and Paris. Yet, the full and equal participation of girls and youth within the development and processes of the forums and Action Coalitions has faltered.

We know that gender inequality begins before a girl is born and it plays out in various ways throughout her childhood. From infanticide to malnutrition to lack of healthcare and unequal access to education, Generation Equality cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of girls; their issues being addressed, their voices being heard and their presence visible and consistent.

To address these gaps, the Working Group on Girls (WGG), working in collaboration with UN Women, invited girls and organizations working around the globe to host local Girls Conversation Circles in the lead up to the 65th Commission on the Status of Women. These girl-led Conversation Circles brought girls together to have productive dialogue about Generation Equality Action Coalition themes, their impact on girls' lives and girls' recommendations for addressing these issues to advance gender equality. Girls selected topics to discuss for their local conversation circles from the following themes:

1. Gender-Based Violence
2. Economic justice and rights
3. Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
4. Feminist action for climate justice
5. Technology and innovation for Gender Equality
6. Feminist movements and leadership
7. Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action

The aim of these conversation circles was to amplify the voices of girls, increase girls' visibility as essential to Generation Equality, and encourage girls' participation and leadership in the political process at the local, national and global level. To this end, WGG developed and provided a toolkit, facilitation guide, adult support guide and conversation summary reporting form to each organization seeking to host a local Girls Conversation Circle. The materials distributed included background information on the Generation Equality Action Coalitions, the program outline of the conversation, and guiding questions to further dialogue in the group.

METHODOLOGY

The majority of conversation circles were led and facilitated by girls for girls, ranging from ages 10-18, with a few groups including girls under 10 years old and some groups being facilitated by adults. We recommended that groups have no more than ten participants to provide more space and time for dialogue. Conversations were held in person or virtually depending on the circumstances of the community. Local conversation circle facilitators then submitted summary reports from their local conversation circle to the WGG. We received 87 reports from the following 26 countries: India, Peru, Nepal, Philippines, Kenya, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Haiti, Angola, Mozambique, USA, Brazil, Cameroon, Australia, Venezuela, Côte d'Ivoire, Mexico, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Panama, Nigeria, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Bolivia with 1,167 girls having participated in the conversation circles.

Following the submissions of reports from local conversation circles, the WGG hosted a live virtual, global Girls Conversation Circle during the 65th Session of the Committee on Status of Women (CSW65), in partnership with NGO CSW. We invited girls who had facilitated local conversation circles, as well as girls from various CSW delegations, and conversation circles were held on each of the Action Coalition themes. Facilitators of these conversation circles also submitted summary reports from their discussions. In the global conversation circle, there were 70 participants in total from the following 18 countries and nations: Nepal, Sri Lanka, Venezuela, USA, India, Peru, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Philippines, United Kingdom, Colombia, Pakistan, Japan, Rwanda, Brazil, Mauritius and Uganda.

We then compiled the local reports and reports from the global conversation circle according to each Action Coalition theme discussed, dividing the topics by “Key Takeaways” and “Recommendations” within each theme. All reports were then synthesized to inform this report.

REPORT SUMMARIES

Gender-based Violence

Forty-eight groups reported discussing gender-based violence within their local conversation circles. Thirty-six reports from the following countries were analyzed: India, Peru, Nepal, Philippines, Kenya, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Haiti, Angola, Mozambique, USA, Brazil, Cameroon, Australia, Venezuela, and Côte d'Ivoire. Participants ranged from ages 10-18.

Key Takeaways:

Girls globally are facing sexual, verbal, physical, digital, and emotional violence. This violence is pervasive within the home, schools, public transport, the internet, and the community at large. Girls noted an amalgam of factors which make girls particularly vulnerable to GBV, including but not limited to: poverty, addiction, adolescent pregnancy, lack of access to

education, menstrual products, sexual education, and contraceptives. The girls placed particular **emphasis on the role of family members, intimate partners, and trusted adults as the perpetrators of this violence, whilst the larger community operates with a victim blaming mentality and ostracizes girls who come forward.** This creates a hostile environment towards victims where it becomes **difficult for girls to share their experiences and find networks of support.**

In addition, girls noted that **local judicial systems tend to side in favor of the perpetrators, actively discouraging girls who have been affected by GBV from coming forward.** There was also note of an **insufficient support network and mental health counseling available to victims experiencing trauma,** and girls reported resorting to alcoholism and drug usage as a means of attempting to cope. There was a consistent theme of **low self esteem and decreased self confidence as a result of being victimized and met with minimal to no community or familial support.** Many of the aforementioned factors contribute to girls' feelings of shame and embarrassment after falling victim to GBV and act as a deterrent to them coming forward.

Further, girls describe **strong pre-existing gender roles and expectations within their communities, aiding harmful GBV practices.** Some specific concerns girls described pertained to **discriminatory property laws and practices, inheritance rights, and unequal access to education.** Overall, the girls alluded to a **devaluation of their growth** in comparison to that of their male counterparts.

Recommendations:

- Ensuring **access to effective legal justice systems.**
- Establishing community centers that serve as **safe spaces** for girls to speak openly about their experiences
- Creating **victim support networks** (conversation circles, clubs, etc.)
- Ensuring **access to information about sexual and reproductive health, menstrual health and the means to make healthy decisions.**
- **Taking a gender inclusive approach when educating others about GBV,** especially men and boys, teachers, and their families and communities.
- **Educating girls about their rights to ensure their confidence in exerting them.**
- **Promoting community outreach and education pertaining to GBV,** keeping a focus on young female-identifying people's experiences.

Economic Justice & Rights

Twenty-eight groups of girls reported discussing economic justice and rights in their local conversation circles. Eleven reports from the following countries were analyzed: Kenya , India,

Brazil, Nepal, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Panama, and Argentina. Participants ranged from 11-18 years old.

Key Takeaways:

A vast majority of the groups cited **education as a major factor in gender inequities related to economic justice & rights**. Girls discussed how other girls need to be taught to believe in themselves in order to develop a strong sense of self and remain autonomously confident overtime. Additionally, **groups noted a lack of education in the community regarding women's rights in general**, where the social norm is that women are seen as weaker than men. Similar to the emphasis on educating girls about their economic rights, the groups also highlighted **issues of gender stereotyping in representation and educational contexts** and mentioned a **lack of respect for women in society** that has not been addressed or even noticed by women receiving the disrespect.

Another common theme emerged regarding **equal pay for equal work**. The girls mention the **gender pay gap**, but also how women are not even offered the same opportunities as men. They also expressed **concern over not being able to achieve the same economic stability as men when they enter the workforce since the same career opportunities are not available to them**.

Recommendations:

- The girls believe that **dialogue and conversation can be used to expose challenges that women face on a regular basis, further educating the population**.
- They also believe that **girls should be taught to ask questions and seek out answers for themselves**.
- They believe **all young children should be taught not to differentiate certain occupations as better suited for specific gender identities**.
- There is also a **call to action for women and girls being taught how they should be treated**
- Girls believe that women should be **offered a right to influence society** just as much as men. **Some of the groups discussed the importance of policymakers listening to women and girls regardless of age, that policymakers should engage more with youth specifically as the voice of future generations** and governments should pay more attention in general.
- Overall, the girls highlighted the importance of **empowering women and girls through gender-inclusive education on respect and rights**.
- Finally, they overwhelmingly expressed deep interest in **creating encouraging environments for young women to gain a strong sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem**.

Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights

Twenty-four groups of girls reported discussing Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights within their local conversation circles. Eleven reports were analyzed from India, Peru, Philippines, Kenya, Indonesia, Haiti, and Vietnam. Participants ranged from 13-18 years old.

Key Takeaways:

The main topics of discussion included **female genital mutilation (FGM), menstruation, and sexual education**.

Sexual education was discussed in all of the groups, and ultimately many of the issues the girls brought up were related to **not having enough information on sexual and reproductive health**. On top of lack of information about sexual health, they also noted the **lack of acceptability and affordability of contraception**. In regards to reproductive health, they felt **unable to adequately counter harmful myths about menstruation and lack of education on menstrual hygiene**. They also noted the **lack of affordability and accessibility of menstruation hygiene products**. Because of their families' lack of sexual and reproductive health education, the family was not a safe or reliable place to discuss any of their issues because of the taboo nature of the topic(s).

FGM was also cited as a reason girls were more likely to become pregnant and no longer attend school.

Recommendations:

- **Comprehensive sexual education** to normalize ideas about sexual health and rights.
- **Teaching all youth how to use the internet safely** so as to reduce common myths around sexual and reproductive health.
- Empower girls to **talk about and take care of their sexual and reproductive health**.
- **Change the patriarchal structure of communities** that reduces girls' access to reproductive and sexual health knowledge and resources.
- That **policy makers push for structural change around sexual and reproductive health** in communities.

Feminst Action for Climate Justice

Eleven groups reported discussing Feminist Action for Climate Justice in their local conversation circle. Reports were analyzed from 3 groups from Peru and India. Participants' ages ranged from 11-18.

Key Takeaways:

Overall, participants felt that **while women are disproportionately affected by climate change and well prepared to combat it, they are rarely given the opportunity to do so.** One discussion group in India noted that **patriarchal systems of power have enabled climate change to further exploit women socially and economically, and have created vulnerable populations of women, whose voices and perspectives are undermined.**

A group from Peru noted in particular the problems of **noise and air pollution in their community**, in addition to use of **unsustainable menstrual sanitation products and diapers.** They felt it important they raise awareness in their communities about these issues.

Recommendations:

- **Involve girls in decision making and encourage their full participation in policy making** to help achieve climate justice.
- Policy makers must **evaluate how policies and issues impact women and girls** and then have funding and programming to support this goal, as well as the continuous support of civil society, government, and communities.
- **Encourage and support women and girls' participation in the fight for climate change.**

Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality

Twenty-one groups of girls reported discussing Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality within their local conversation circles. Reports from India, Brazil, Nepal, Kenya, Peru, and the USA were analyzed. Participants ranged from 13-18 years old.

Key Takeaways:

Many girls felt either that they would be supported by their families in their wish to pursue STEM careers/interest, or that **acceptance was growing for women in technology-based careers in their communities.** However, some groups noted that families tend to see STEM education as a waste of money for their daughters and are hesitant to give daughters technology because they will use the devices instead of doing housework. Some girls noted an overarching **discouraging societal attitude towards girls and technology, as well as stereotypes about girls' capability**, greatly affecting the practical feasibility of pursuing a STEM career. Girls mentioned the need to **break stereotypes and overcome oppression to gain access to STEM fields.**

The importance of STEM fields as far as societal development moving into the future was repeatedly stressed, **but access to the technology needed to access these fields was noted as an issue across the board.**

Girls also noted a **lack of recognition of women's achievements in STEM.**

Recommendations:

- **Tackling stereotypes and prejudices** seemed to be the most overarching change that the girls sought to make, with many believing that **the simple understanding that girls can do anything that boys can do would solve many of the struggles they are facing.**
- **Addressing the need for family support for girls pursuing STEM.**
- Acknowledging the importance of **education for equality.**
- **Recognizing technological and scientific achievements of women in the past.**
- Stressing the **significance of innovation for self-improvement and income generation as well as IT for economic development.**

Feminist Movements & Leadership

Twenty-five groups reported discussing Feminist Movements and Leadership in their local conversation circles. Reports were analyzed from 5 groups from Bolivia, India, Peru, and the U.S. Participants' ages ranged from 13-18.

Key Takeaways:

Girls talked about the importance of **holding everyone accountable for the treatment of women and girls**; they explain that **cultural norms and stereotyping present formidable barriers** from which they want to break free.

Another challenge girls discussed was the **difficulty women face in achieving leadership positions and participating in decision making** due to cultural norms and stereotypes. For example, they brought up the common idea that **a woman cannot lead because she must stay at home to take care of children.** In other cases, they mention that there are actual **laws prohibiting women from holding certain positions.** Additionally, they noted **violence against women, child marriage, and less opportunities for women to be educated as barriers.** One group in the US noted the importance of **holding women politicians accountable for their actions** too, as they are not inherently feminist.

Ultimately, **girls say that the cultural norms and stereotypes above negatively impact their mental health and self-confidence.**

One group from Peru noted that being in **leadership workshops have increased their confidence**, and generally speaking many groups felt being educated on women's rights and leadership should be a part of all childrens' education.

Recommendations:

- **Women need equal opportunity in decision making at all levels** (family, society, and government) in addition to holding more leadership positions.
- Media should **highlight the success of women in leadership**.
- Awareness should be raised in communities to **encourage girls' decision making**.
- **Laws preventing womens' decision making** should be changed.
- **Fund programs that empower girls**.
- **Increase womens' opportunities in work and education** through quotas.
- **Support girls organizing and leading change** and give them opportunities to create alliances and network.
- **Educate girls about their rights**, women's history, and women leaders from a young age and **educate boys on gender equality too**. Educate girls' on how to advocate for themselves and others.

Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action

Twenty-six groups reported discussing Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action in their local conversation circle. Reports were analyzed from 8 groups from India, Japan, Pakistan, and the US. Participants' ages ranged from 13-18.

Key Takeaways:

Girls varied in their sense of safety and security from relatively safe to unsafe. **Girls reported feeling unsafe in the homes, schools, and general outside communities**. Girls feel that this is due in part to the **lack of complete education for all girls and women**, which would help **normalize girls and women doing what they want**. They also see that **women and girls are asked to do everything to support men, and boys are not taught to support or respect girls**. They believe it is important that **all people are educated on Women's Human Rights and taught to treat girls with respect**.

Speaking publicly about harassment or assaults is either not believed or ridiculed. This is due in large part to the lack of education of men and women and sexist beliefs that men are superior.

Something noted by a group in Sri Lanka is that **war should not mean danger for women**. Women and girls are experiencing dangerous conditions both in war time and in peacetime.

Recommendations:

- **Make space for girls to advocate for all girls and provide them with a platform to do so.**
- **Boys should be educated to respect women and girls and help end violence against women and girls.**
- **Policy makers should raise funds to make anti-sexist education possible in every country.**
- **Educate girls on their rights and teach them how to defend themselves.**

CONCLUSION

The aim of conducting these conversation circles was to provide a space for girls' to speak to issues that affect and matter to them for the purpose of informing and influencing Generation Equality discussions and to promote girls' participation in the political process at the local, national and global level. In the conversation circles held, girls discussed all of the Generation Equality Action Coalition themes, including Gender-based Violence, Economic Justice and Rights, Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Feminist Action for Climate Justice, Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality, Feminist Movements and Leadership, and finally Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action. Girls shared their perspectives on these issues as well as their lived experiences.

Through their conversations, girls provided their recommendations to effect change within these issues to advance gender equality. **Recommendations include:**

- Educating communities to end harmful gender stereotypes and practices
- Educating girls on their rights
- Providing equal opportunities for women for economic advancement
- Creating safe spaces for girls to advocate for themselves
- Ensuring equal decision-making for women at all levels (family, society, government)
- Providing access to technology for girls and supporting them in STEM careers
- Providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education
- Ensuring access to effective legal justice systems that address gender-based violence
- Involving girls in decision making and encouraging their full participation in policy making to help achieve climate justice
- Listening to and including girls at the policy and decision-making level in all issues that affect them.

The WGG hopes that this report is used for advocacy to pay proper attention to what girls are saying, to their experiences, perspectives, and voices, and to effectively implement their recommendations stated within.