

APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY AROUND THE WORLD

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Editorial

Pr. Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy, IAAP Past-President (2022-2026)

With this Editorial, let me open the second issue of the sixth volume of Applied Psychology Around the World which is devoted to Issues related to Gender in connection with the 68th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. As stated on the UN webpage, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. Initially, the Commission focused on legal measures to protect the human rights of women and awareness-raising on the status and situation of women around the world. Debates in the Commission brought unfamiliar issues into the international political arena. The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women across the world. The CSW has provided a unique space for exchange of national experience and good practice and for bringing the voice of the women's movement to the United Nations. The CSW meets each year, in March, for two weeks, often starting on March 8th, Women's Day. This year it took place from March 11th to March 22nd.

And IAAP was not only very present but also extremely involved. In fact, the *International Association of Applied Psychology* has been during the past couple of years always very involved in CSW. But this year, IAAP organized five live events and four online parallel events, some of which are described in a special section of this issue, with papers 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

When I started my term as President of IAAP, in July 2018, in agreement with the Board of Directors, we created a Special Project on **Gender Equalities**; this Special Project was chaired by Kristina Potočnik and there already was a <u>Special Issue of APAW</u> dedicated to Gender Equity, in June 2019, and a webinar in **September 13, 2022.**

As usual, following this Editorial we have the Message from the President of IAAP: Lori Foster.

In this issue, the different papers cover a series of gender topics, including the 7 papers in



connection to sessions organized by and at the United Nations in relation to Gender Issues around the world during CSW in March 2024, plus a series of other connected papers. Papers cover topics related to Poverty, Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking, Sexual Violence, Technological Innovation used for prevention of Violence, Empowerment of Girls and Women, Financial Inclusion, Gender disparity and post-natural disaster, Gender Socialization Practices.

In this issue, we also have a very interesting paper, prepared by our Geneva UN team, on humanitarian workers and in particular how their working conditions affect their mental well-being. This paper could have been included in our previous issue devoted to *Peace Building*, but we received after the issue was published and decided to include it here even though it does not specifically deal with Issues related to Gender...

Once again, I want to thank Dr. Judy Kuriansky for her extended involvement withing IAAP and for APAW issues! As a Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College, Dr. Judy Kuriansky involves her students in gender equality projects and in activities at the United Nations.

I also wish to share with you all, a <u>short video</u> (12 minutes) in Spanish but subtitled in English; it is about a project in the region of Montes de Maria



Planet 50-50 by 2030 Step It Up for Gender Equality

with communities that have been greatly affected by violence in building a model of mental health care with communities. This video has been prepared by a long-term member of IAAP: Prof. Wilson López López from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, in Bogotá, Colombia.

I hope that you will enjoy reading this second issue of Volume 6. In a way, I would like this issue to be the last one I will be in charge of after starting APAW when I began my term as President of IAAP in June 2018, and taking care of 6 Volumes and a total of 20 Issues... I wish a long life to Applied Psychology Around the World!

Now, the next issue will be devoted to the young generation of Applied Psychologists from all over the planet. Do not forget that, an important yearly event started during my term, which is the **Early Career Marathon**, a 24 hour long scientific event Integrating Research and Practice. This time, this very stimulating event will take place in **February 2025**, the 22nd and 23th. Please note that if you are a senior researcher, it is your role to advertise towards students and early career Psychologists. If you are a student or an early career Psychologist, please note that you need to submit before August 16, 2024. Do not hesitate to go to our dedicated webpage for more information.

Also, I hope that you are already getting ready for thought-provoking presentations at the International

Congress of Applied Psychology, the ICAP, that will take place in **Florence in July 2026**, after eight years with no ICAP due to COVID-19. This will indeed be a great occasion to meet again and to network among Psychologists from around the world!

The Sixth P: Psychology and Gender Equality

Lori Foster, IAAP President (2022 - 2026)

Greetings to all our readers. As we embark on another edition of *Applied Psychology Around the World* (APAW), I am pleased to address a topic that closely resonates with our global commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—specifically, SDG 5: Gender Equality.

The Sixth P: Psychology

Before discussing gender equality, I want to remind everyone of the Sixth P. While the UN's Agenda 2030 focuses on People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships—the 5 Ps—a Sixth P, Psychology, is needed. Psychology is essential for understanding and influencing human behavior, which is at the heart of efforts to achieve sustainable development. Integrating psychological insights into sustainable development strategies can drive meaningful change and progress toward a more equitable and sustainable world. Central to this effort is addressing gender inequality, a pervasive issue that hinders progress across all aspects of sustainable development.

Gender Inequity's Early Beginning

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Psychology has a long history of scholarship in this area, playing a crucial role in understanding and addressing gender disparities.

When you think of equal opportunity, what comes to mind? Your answer may be shaped by where in the world you are as you read this. Perhaps you think of access to education, jobs, or leadership positions. But it starts long before that. For example, consider the practice of female foeticide—the aborting of a fetus because the fetus is female. Indian psychologist Urmi Nanda Biswas has conducted extensive research on this issue, examining the motivations and societal pressures behind female foeticide. Her work highlights the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and social factors that contribute to this practice. Biswas's research is crucial for developing culturally sensitive policies and programs aimed at eradicating female foeticide and promoting gender equality (Dogra, 2018).



Gender Inequities Persist

After birth, gender inequities persist in various sectors, including education, health, employment, and leadership. Psychology is relevant to each of these areas:

Education: Psychological research helps identify and mitigate factors contributing to gender gaps in education. For example, by addressing stereotypes and biases, we can encourage equal participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields and other traditionally male-dominated areas.

Health: Gender differences in health outcomes can often be traced to psychological and social determinants. We can develop more effective health

The Sixth P cont.

interventions that account for these gender-specific factors by integrating psychological perspectives.

Workplace: In organizational settings, psychology informs policies that promote gender equity. This includes understanding and countering biases, designing equitable hiring practices, and fostering inclusive workplace cultures that support career advancement for everyone.

Leadership: Increasing female representation in leadership roles is essential for gender equality. One of SDG 5's targets is to "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 18). Psychological studies on leadership styles and gender can help dismantle barriers to women's advancement and promote more inclusive leadership models.

What Can Applied Psychology and Psychologists Do?

Psychologists have an important role in advancing gender equality. By leveraging our expertise, we can make significant strides in addressing and mitigating gender disparities across various domains. Here are three key actions for applied psychology and psychologists:

Conduct Rigorous Research: Conducting rigorous and culturally nuanced research helps illuminate gender issues and provide evidence-based insights for interventions and policies. Additionally, the gender composition of research teams is important to consider. Research indicates that gender-diverse teams tend to produce more novel and highly cited papers than teams composed exclusively of men or women. These performance advantages increase with greater gender balance and appear to be consistent across small and large teams (Yang et al., 2022).

Influence Policy and Systems: Psychologists can influence policy and systems at various levels, including government, schools, and organizations.

Consider, for instance, the work of Swiss scholar Iris Bohnet. In her book *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*, Bohnet suggests that changing hearts and minds is not sufficient; we must also change the systems within which we operate. Bohnet highlights how structural changes in organizations can reduce gender bias, such as anonymizing job applications to mitigate bias in hiring decisions (Bohnet, 2016; Buckley, 2018).

Influencing policy can mean communicating research findings in ways policymakers can understand and collaborating with policymakers, as the International Association of Applied Psychology's United Nations teams so often do. It can also mean becoming policymakers ourselves. Encouraging and supporting psychologists in key positions in government and other organizations can go a long way toward effecting change.

Diversify Speakers: My third point will resonate with many readers involved in organizing events. Diversify your speakers to ensure gender equity. Findings from American psychologist Christy Nittrouer and her team highlight disparities in speaking opportunities between men and women. Nittrouer's findings show that men are invited to give more than twice as many talks as women at top U.S. universities. This disparity persists even after accounting for the rank and number of available speakers (Nittrouer et al., 2018).

Ensuring gender equity in speaking engagements can have significant implications for career advancement and visibility. By promoting a diverse range of speakers, we can help create a more inclusive professional environment that recognizes and values contributions from all genders. The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) is committed to leading by example in this area. We actively strive to ensure gender equity in our own events and encourage our members to prioritize diversity in their speaker selections.

The Power of Collaboration

Remember SDG #17? It refers to *Partnership for the Goals*. As always, collaboration is key. IAAP is

The Sixth P cont.

in a good position to take action because we are a global organization with 18 divisions representing many areas of psychology related to the issues discussed in this article. Our diverse membership and broad expertise allow us to tackle gender equality from multiple angles, ensuring our efforts are effective and culturally sensitive. By fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, we can amplify our impact. For instance, combining insights from educational psychology, organizational psychology, and health psychology can lead to comprehensive strategies that address gender disparities holistically. Additionally, we must ensure that psychology's work in this area is global, as gender issues manifest differently in different parts of the world.

Closing

As we move forward, let us reaffirm our commitment to gender equality as a core element of sustainable development. The challenges are significant, but so is our potential for positive change. By leveraging our psychological expertise and embracing global diversity, we can contribute to a world where everyone, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive.

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Poverty, Trauma, and Mental Illness: Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Southeast Asian Countries

Apoorva Annadi¹

Introduction

Poverty is intricately linked with worse physical health outcomes, heightened exposure to trauma, violence and crime, and diminished social status, all of which can significantly impact mental wellbeing (Ridley et al., 2020). Mental illness, in turn, exacerbates economic hardships for individuals and may hinder education and skill acquisition among youth and exacerbate gender inequalities through its disproportionate prevalence among women (Ridley et al., 2020). Specifically in Southeast Asia, marked gender discrimination has led to the second-class status of women in society, where factors such as mobility, work, self-esteem, and even worth are often contingent upon male members of a patriarchal society (Niaz & Hassan, 2006). This lack of empowerment, coupled with financial and economic dependence, restricts women's selfexpression and life choices, which, when combined with family and societal pressures, has a definite impact on women's mental health (Niaz & Hassan, 2006).

Overview of an event addressing these issues

The interrelationship of poverty and mental health, especially problematic for Southeast Asian women, was addressed in an event during the 2024 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) NGO CSW/NY Forum, entitled "Poverty, Trauma, and Mental Illness- The Ubiquitous Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Southeast Asian Countries".

The NGO CSW Forum serves as a platform for global civil society, non-governmental organizations, and feminists to engage with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) (NGO CSW68 Forum, n.d.).

The event was organized by the Pakistani American Psychiatric Association of North America (PAPANA), a non-profit, professional, and educational organization aims to improve the quality of psychiatric care in the United States and Pakistan through scientific development and education in psychiatry (About Us – PAPANA, n.d.).

The event was held online over Zoom on March 14, 2024, from 6:30PM to 8:00PM EST.

This report reviews the event and gives citations of studies supporting the startling statistics presented by the panelists.

Alignment with the UN Agenda

The topic about women, poverty and mental health is aligned with the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pertaining especially to SDGs 1, 4, and 5.

SDG 1 calls for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (The United Nations, n.d.). Across the Southeast Asian region, there are disparities in access to economic resources and basic ownership, hindering progress especially towards SDG 1.4 which addresses equal rights to ownership, basic services, technology, and economic resources (Project Everyone, n.d.).

SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Barriers to equal access to affordable technical, vocational, and higher education, as outlined in SDG 4.2, exacerbate inequalities and perpetuate poverty and exclusion (Project Everyone, n.d.). Furthermore, discriminatory practices in education in Southeast Asia pose

significant barriers to achieving SDG 4.5, which aims to eradicate all forms of discrimination in education.

SDG 5 calls for gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (The United Nations, n.d.). Moreover, SDGs 5.1 and 5.3, which strive to end discrimination against woman and girls and eliminate forced marriages and genital mutilation, respectively (Project Everyone, n.d.). In Southeast Asia, disparities in access to resources and opportunities exacerbate gender inequalities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disempowerment among women and girls. Forced marriages and genital mutilation further perpetuate cycles of gender inequality, denying women and girls their fundamental rights and preserving harmful social norms.

Specifics of the Event



Parallel Event Flyer

The panelists were four medical doctors of Pakistani descent:

- Dr. Gull Shahmir Hasnat, MBBS, Physician at CMH Medical and Dental College in Lahore, Pakistan
- Dr. Sadiq Naveed, MD, MPH, DFAACAP, Psychiatry Program Director at the Eastern Connecticut Health Network; Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Connecticut; Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Frank H Netter School of Medicine at Quinnipiac University; Fellow in-Infant-Parent Mental Health at the University of Massachusetts-Boston; and Associate Editor of -BioMed Central (BMC)Psychiatry
- Dr. Fauzia Arain, MD, Psychiatry Resident at

Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Former Chief Fellow Child & Adolescent Psychiatry at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai-BronxCare Hospital New York, USA

Dr. Anum Khan, MD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry- Columbia University Medical Center, New York, USA.



Panelists (top to bottom): Dr. Anum Khan, Dr. Sadiq Naveed, Dr. Gull Hasnat, and Dr. Fauzia Arain

The event was divided into four sections covering four different topics, with each panelist covering one topic. The four topics together created a holistic view of the subject matter. The fifth and final section was a Q and A with the attendees.

Section 1: Overview, presented by Dr. Gull Hasnat

The first section, consisting of an overview, was covered by Dr. Gull Hasnat.



Slide of Dr. Gul Hasnat presenting an overall view of South Asia regional problems (screenshot)

Dr. Hasnat began by describing the region of South Asia, which comprises two sub-regions, eleven countries, and a multitude of climates. She highlighted that her presentation aims to discuss the problems endemic in these regions, which are shared despite cultural and social nuances across the region.

She explained the main economic hurdles this region faces, which are that:

1) large areas of the population live as low-er to middle income households

2) large population numbers are living on less than USD\$3.20 a day.

These problems were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which erased over nine million jobs, pushing people into poverty. Moreover, the gender wage gap in these countries is 33%, more than the global average of 24%. Women are earning up to 42% less than men in Southeast Asia. Further, not only are most households low income, they are

also single income. This becomes a serious problem as the average number of people in these families are large, namely, 4.5 to 7. Adding to the problems, population growth is far outrunning the available resources, specifically education and health, leading to detrimental side effects, such as a drop in literacy rates.

Additionally, social norms disadvantage women in their education, career, safety, and autonomy. Specifically, women are encouraged to prioritize getting married and having kids over getting educated and pursuing a career. Instead of focusing on their own goals, they are taught to focus on supporting the goals of the men in their lives. The education of women suffers greatly from poverty in most households, in that girls are pulled out of school at the first sign of scarce funds.

Violence against women makes the situation even worse. Violence is encouraged via archaic practices including honor killings and bride price. For context, honor killing is where a woman or girl is murdered by a male family member and the killers justify their actions by claiming that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family name or prestige (Honor Killing | Causes, Consequences & Solutions | Britannica, n.d.). Bride price is a payment given by or on behalf of a prospective husband to the bride's family (Definition of Bride-Price, n.d.). Additionally, women are taught to keep quiet in the face of this abuse.

"The socio-economic set up in conjunction with cultural norms promotes the subordination of women socially and economically," Dr. Hasnat said.

She asked the attendees to imagine a case example and to reflect about how the issues she just mentioned relate to this case.

Case: Mariam is an 11-year-old girl who lives in Lahore, Pakistan, with her family of seven people. Although her parents are both employed, the family's income is negligible. Most of her mother's income goes towards paying rent and the father's

income goes towards paying basic necessities. The fee for Mariam's school is 20 Rupees (less than US 20 cents) per month, but her parents cannot afford her books and school supplies. From the year 2021, Mariam has been responsible for taking care of her three younger siblings, as their grandmother passed away from COVID. One of Mariam's brothers, a year older than her, is still going to school. Mariam wanted to become a teacher, but this goal seems unattainable with her education impeded, added to her feeling that it is important for her to contribute to the household.

Dr. Hasnat intended to leave the attendees with their thoughts about this case while her colleagues made their presentations.

Section 2: Mental Health and Women in Southeast Asia, presented by, Dr. Sadiq Naveed

The second topic addressed mental health and women in Southeast Asia, presented by Dr. Sadiq Naveed.



Dr. Sadiq Naveed presenting his section (screenshot)

Dr. Naveed started by speaking about the burden of mental illness in Southeast Asia. In startling statistics comparing help available in regions, he reported that about 76-85% of people with a mental disorder in lower income countries receive no treatment for their mental illnesses, as compared to 35% in high income countries who do receive needed treatment.

Furthermore, the median number of mental health providers in Southeast Asia is 5.3 per 100,000 populations. Additionally, there is also only one psychiatrist per 100,000 population in nine out of the

eleven countries. He explained that the region has a high prevalence of "internalizing" disorders, which include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Naveed et al., 2020). In addition, he said that research from India has indicated that women have a higher prevalence rate of mental disorders than men, and that these statistics are consistent with those of women in the adjacent countries to India of Nepal and Bangladesh.

He concluded his section by speaking about the factors that contribute to the development of mental illness in Southeast Asian women. These include (Niaz & Hassan, 2006):

- Poverty
- Overcrowded living conditions
- Unemployment
- Broken marriages (marital conflicts, issues with in-laws)
- Violence
- Stigma
- Reproductive health (postnatal depression, pregnancy loss, infertility)
- Financial dependence on men (lack of autonomy)
- Trauma (emotional, physical, and sexual abuse)
- Traditions and values (honor killing, exchange marriages)

Section 3: Trauma and Intimate Partner Violence, presented by Dr. Fauzia Arain

The third section was on the topic of trauma and intimate partner violence, presented by Dr. Fauzia Arain



Dr. Fauzia Arain presenting her section (screenshot)

Dr. Arain started by identifying three factors that trauma in South Asian women includes, namely, intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual abuse, and traditional gender roles.

She defined IPV as behavior in intimate relationships causing harm or distress, which includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as controlling behaviors. Such IPV affects women of all ages, economic statuses, and cultures. Specifically, one in three women are affected globally (Stöckl et al., 2014).

While women are affected globally, Dr. Arain explained that the prevalence of IPV in Southeast Asia, according to the statistics of the World Health Organization (WHO), exceeds the global average (World Health Organization, 2013). Moreover, these higher rates of IPV stem from entrenched gender norms, economic stress, and societal acceptance of violence, which is further intensified by inadequate legal protections (World Health Organization, 2013).

Next, Dr. Arain outlined three main health outcomes of IPV - physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health- which in turn raise morbidity and mortality rates (Sere et al., 2021). Specifically, the risk of depression as well as abortion are doubled (Usher et al., 2020). Finally, approximately 41% of women report physical injuries, meaning there is a significant fatality risk (Breiding et al., 2014).

Following this, Dr. Arain spoke about postpartum depression (PPD) and domestic violence (DV) in Asia. An analysis of 38 studies involving 37,087 participants across Asia found that the PPD prevalence ranges from 8.2 to 70% and the DV prevalence from 6.1% to 67.4% (Koirala & Chuemchit, 2020). DV sufferers have 1.6 to 7.1 times higher odds of experiencing PPD (Koirala & Chuemchit, 2020). Psychological abuse is closely linked to PPD, along with family violence and increased suicidal thoughts (Koirala & Chuemchit, 2020). There is a clear link between DV and PPD, she said.

All these startling statistics indicate that urgent action is needed, Dr. Arain emphasized.

Recommendations include: 1) training to better equip healthcare workers to support women facing DV and PPD, and 2) the implementation of global policies to deter perpetrators.

Dr. Arain continued to outline deleterious conditions for South Asian women. She addressed the potential unique mental health impacts on Asian women from IPV, pointing out that poorer mental health, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and sleep disruption was reported in South Asian women who experienced IPV (Hurwitz et al., 2006).

Subsequently, Dr. Arain addressed the prevalence, consequences, and health outcomes of child marriage in South Asia. Over 42% of women in South Asia are married before turning 18 (Kamal & Ulas, 2021). Bangladesh leads the region with the highest number (74%) of early marriages, Nepal and Afghanistan reporting 50% of women aged 20-49 married in childhood, India at 41%, and Pakistan at 35.6 % (Kamal & Ulas, 2021).

Child marriage is a serious problem, with many extremely negative consequences. For example, such early marriages lead to increased violence against girls, both physically and sexually. It also isolates young girls, making them dependent on their husbands and helpless, depriving them of their fundamental rights to education and safety, affecting their reproductive health, and creating higher risks of poor health complications. Importantly, the next generation is frequently stuck in the same cycle (Fan & Koski, 2022).

Dr. Arain repeated that there is a serious need for action. She recommended that:

- 1. Educational and economic factors need to be addressed
- 2. Strict marriage laws need to be enforced
- 3. Psychoeducation regarding child marriage's health impacts needs to be created and distributed

To conclude her section, Dr. Arain highlighted the challenges in addressing IPV in Southeast Asia and current efforts to address it. The challenges, which are many, include: significant reporting barriers (due to factors like cultural stigma, societal norms, and a lack of awareness); help-seeking challenges, (due to factors like a fear of retaliation, economic dependence, and limited legal protections); and the need for comprehensive, multifaceted solutions.

She ended on a more optimistic note, saying that fortunately, there are current efforts to address IPV. Both global and regional efforts are underway to combat IPV through policy changes, education, and support for survivors. Specifically, Southeast Asia has seen initiatives aiming to strengthen legal frameworks, provide support services, and raise public awareness about the dangers of IPV.

Section 4: Summary and Action Steps presented by Dr. Anum Khan

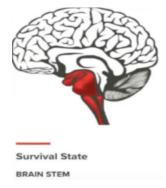
The fourth section, consisting of a summary and action steps, was presented by Dr. Anum Khan.



Dr. Anum Khan presenting her section (screenshot)

Dr. Khan started her section by showing a video of a grandmother talking about the barriers she faced while trying to educate her granddaughter. The granddaughter needed something for school and the mother and grandmother did not have the resources to help her. Growing frustrated by her daughter's nagging, the mother beat her. The next day, the child went to school without the requested supplies and her teacher also beat her. In these two tragic situations, the girl was punished for asking for "basic needs".

Building on this tragic example, Dr. Khan spoke about the "Conscious Discipline Brain State Model" a framework for understanding behavior, which demonstrates the hierarchical function of the brain in practical terms (Ruffo, 2020)



The Survival State in the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model ("Brain State Model," n.d.)

According to this model, the survival state (located in the brain stem) represents the base level of the brain state, which gives access to the most primal and physical skill set, including fight, flight, and hide (Ruffo, 2020). It essentially asks the question, "Am I safe?", with the only way to soothe the brain out of this state being through the creation of safety.



The Executive State in the Conscious Discipline Brain State model ("Brain State Model," n.d.)

The executive state (located in the brain's prefrontal lobes) represents the optimal state for problem

solving and learning. This state asks the question, "What can I learn from this"? Dr. Khan stated that to answer this question "interventions should seek to move people from the survival state to the executive state". In other words, interventions need to emphasize learning from stress rather than sitting with the negative emotions stress causes. To reiterate this, Dr. Khan asked the question "Okay, I experienced this, but what can I learn from it now"?

Dr. Khan then spoke about the ways to implement change at various levels:

Individual and family levels

- Identify the problem by naming the issue (language is important as it can aggravate or soothe the ailing)
- Provide support, not advice
- Ensure there is a safe place so speak about concerns and safe people with whom to speak

Community and societal levels

- Understand the major issues in society
- Since the majority is setting the norm, identify the majority to advocate for change
- Identify potential barriers (caste, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, race)
- Identify the marginalized and promote their well-being

Environmental level

- Are individuals allowed the physical and/or mental space to synthesize their feelings?
- Are individuals comfortable expressing themselves in a healthy way? If not, is the environment preventing this?
- How does society react to trauma and/or mental illness? Are there legal implications?

Administrative level

- Clarify the objectives for a project
- Have a strategy
- Understand the potential financial restrictions
- Identify which is better, improving a current system or suggesting a new program

Following this explanation, Dr. Khan emphasized the importance of understanding a person's resources. She posed the question: "If you don't have resources, what can you do?"

As an answer to her own question, she gave examples of two interventions that prioritize resource conservation. The first was capacity-building. Dr. Khan described this process as following the common phrase: "Instead of giving a person a fish, you are teaching them how to fish". This strategy gives people needed technical skills to become impactful.

Following this, she described task shifting/task sharing, when tasks are passed from highly qualified healthcare workers to healthcare workers with less training and qualifications. This process is helpful by increasing the number of helpers especially in settings where there are few professionals available or accessible.

Besides task shifting, collaboration is also a solution. Dr. Khan ended with a message about the importance of collaboration, saying that "Collaboration is crucial in creating interventions [because] we work with finite resources, and it is important to collaborate to avoid effort without an outcome."

Final Section: Q&A

The Q&A session consisted of questions from attendees which they posed in the chat, and verbally expressed by un-muting their microphone. The question was then answered by one or more of the panelists.

Q1: "How do we advocate for mental health within our own South Asian households considering the traditional stigma and pushback we face within South Asian communities"?

Answers to Q1 by the panelists:

Dr. Naveed: "It is most important to keep the conversation going. Advocating for and implementing multisystem interventions, such as

involving religious leaders, will also be helpful. This can normalize talking about mental health and direct people to seek help".



(top row, left to right): Asim A (attendee), Dr. Anum Khan (panelist), Dr. Gul Hasnat (panelist) (middle row, left to right) Dr. Fauzia Arain (panelist), Dawn Beichner-Thomas (attendee), Dr. Sadiq Naveed (panelist) (bottom row): Apoorva Annadi (attendee and reporter of this event)

Dr. Khan: "The media can show stories of those with mental illness and normalize/humanize them".

Dr. Hasnat: "People do not realize what they are going through. They need a name to understand what is happening. This is why it is important to keep talking about mental health".

Dr. Arain: "Mental health issues are now being discussed in Pakistani media, so there is some change happening".

Q2: "South Asians usually seek the advice of a religious scholar first regarding mental health issues. This causes delays in getting treatment from a medical professional. How can these delays be decreased? How can the religious community be educated on mental illness to better support people seeking help from them?

Answers to Q2 by the panelists:

Dr. Naveed: "We have to make the religious leaders stakeholders and involve them in the conversation. It is okay for people to seek the advice of religious scholars, but the scholars need to know what to do next. They need to be educated on mental health because they can only see what their brain knows". Dr. Arain: "Spirituality is now being introduced in interventions, and this integration could increase help-seeking behaviors".

Dr. Hasnat: "On social media, some religious scholars integrate mental health in whatever they are discussing religion as. This could be helpful."

At the end, the reporter of this event asked this question:

Q: "How can we ensure cultural sensitivity when treating South Asian individuals? Stigma influences help-seeking behaviors and I'm curious as to how we can encourage seeking help by providing care that is more culturally relevant.

Answers to my question by the panelists:

Dr. Khan: "This is a really important question and something I struggle with sometimes. I try to engage with family members along with the people who are suffering. I am also very comfortable bringing my own background into it. I say things like -I come from a background where talking about this is heavily stigmatized- to hopefully make patients more comfortable opening up".

Dr. Naveed: "We are never going to have enough South Asian therapists. But, what matters is how open you are to listening to the patient and learning about their culture. Also, resistance is a part of intervention. You need to evaluate why a person is resisting help. Is it stigma or another reason"?

Personal Reflections

Hearing these South Asian experts candidly speak about how, sadly, our culture perpetuates violence against women and stigma surrounding mental health gives me hope that other similar conversations will take place. Right now, South Asians continue to deny the potentially harmful aspects of our culture, especially on women and girls, and therefore invalidate those who are suffering. This presentation confirmed to me that psychoeducation is the best way to attack this problem. As a future clinician hoping to open a practice catering to the Asian American community, this learning is invaluable.

Event Overview

Title: Poverty, Trauma, and Mental Illness- The Ubiquitous Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Southeast Asian Countries

Date/Time: March 14, 2024, 6:30PM to 8PM (EST)

Location: Online (Zoom)

Panelists:

*Dr. Gull Hasnat, MBBS

*Dr. Anum Khan, MD

*Dr. Fauzia Arain, MD

*Dr. Sadiq Naveed, MD, MPH

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Author Bios

Reported by **Apoorva Annadi**, a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology pursuing a masters' degree in Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations". In addition, she is a research assistant in two minority mental health-based labs and one Asian American mental health start-up. She is interested in how to make treatment strategies for mood and anxiety disorders more culturally relevant for the Asian American community.

Edited by **Dr. Judy Kuriansky**, Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College adjunct faculty, who teaches the unique course on "Psychology and the United Nations". At the United Nations, she is a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and Advisor for the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. Further, she is Policy Advisor to Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of the Republic of Sierra Leone in Washington DC. A former television reporter, radio talk show host and newspaper columnist and award-winning journalist, she is the author of many professional journal articles and books on international issues, including disaster recovery, Ebola, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, and the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection. She has advocated for, organized innumerable events and conferences, and spoken at the UN and worldwide about the intersection of mental health with other sustainable development goals, on gender equality, education, peace, climate action and partnerships. She also partnered with the then-Ambassador of Palau, Dr Caleb Otto, to successfully insure that mental health and well-being was included in the UN 203 Ganda and co-founded the UN Group of Friends of Mental health and Well-being. An active advocate also on behalf of women and girls, she co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp in Africa, supports the #HandsOffOurGirls initiative of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio, co-organizes innumerable events and conferences, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and co-edited a volume on "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives."

A United Nations Panel Discussion

Dilara Asena Ozbutun and Judy Kuriansky

The global failure to recognize the severity of sexual abuse of women and girls has led to a legal system that fails to protect survivors and a societal complex that neglects their reality. Complicating this issue, only 5-20% of survivors report their experience to authorities and women's experiences of the justice system are complex and not always positive (Lorenz et. al, 2019). The omission of necessary action has given rise to public outcry for justice for survivors by many civil society groups. A major advance on the international level is an historic United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted in September 2022 on "International cooperation for access to justice, remedies and assistance for survivors of sexual violence" spearheaded by the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio with support from Nigeria and other countries, which condemned all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and outlined a series of measures for governments to take effective action, in line with international law (United Nations, 2022). Still, experts and advocates insist that much action needs to be taken not only to stricter legal action against perpetrators but to protect and bolster the rights of survivors all around the globe.

A panel discussion addressing these issues was held on the topic of "*The Victims' Rights Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, or Harassment*" in the ECOSOC Chamber at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, on Monday, January 29, 2024. This report covers that discussion as well as background and future implications of the issue.

The panelists were United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate Ms. Jane Connors; playwright Ms. Suzie Miller; Senior Victims' Rights Officer in South Sudan Ms. Maria Nakabiito; Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Management Strategy, Policy, and Compliance Ms. Catherine Pollard; and Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships at UN Women Ms. Kirsi Madi.



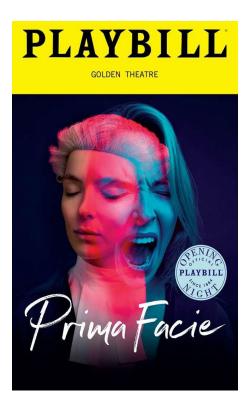
Panelists (left to right): Kirsi Madi, Suzie Miller, Jane Connors

The focus of the event was on the widely acclaimed one-woman dramatic play *Prima Facie*, written by Ms. Miller, about a criminal defense barrister whose view of the legal system changes after she is sexually assaulted.

The phrase *Prima Facie* is a Latin expression meaning "at first sight" or "based on first impression". In both civil and criminal law, the term denotes that initial examination shows that there is sufficient evidence in a legal claim to proceed to trial or judgment.

The play follows a "crisis-of-faith-type" plot about Tessa, the criminal defense barrister (British term for trial lawyer or litigator in America) – who is the sole character – who specializes in defending male perpetrators of sexual assault but then is assaulted herself. The play explores the nuances of being a sexual violence survivor in the legal system and promotes the urgency for policy change (National Theatre Live, n.d.).

After decades of development, the play was mounted on Broadway and won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in April 2023, with Jodie Comer, the actress who played the main character Tessa, winning the Olivier Award for Best Actress.



Playbill cover of the play Prima Facie on Broadway



Actor Jodie Comer in play Prima Facie

Actor Jodie Comer also won the 2023 Theatre World award for her role in the play Prima Facie. In her acceptance speech, she shared her awakening of the impact of her role as a sexually assaulted woman from an appreciative letter from a real-life suffering woman. In accepting the TONY award the next week for her performance, Comer exclaimed, "This play has been my greatest teacher," adding wistfully that the run only had three more weeks.

In 2023, Ms. Miller had a \$20,000 award named after her to support mid-career writers (Blake, 2023).

Biographies of the panelists (note: photos from the UN Office of Victims' Rights Advocate about the event)



Ms. Jane Connors is the first United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate, whose job is to put the rights of and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations and

related personnel at the center of prevention and rehabilitation efforts (UN OVRA, 2024). Appointed by the UN Secretary- General in 2017, her work has led to a statistically safer environment by enhancing common understanding, through training modules and lectures, of the victim-centered approach which means not only bearing victims in mind but putting them at the forefront.

Prior to joining the UN, she had a long career in human rights advocacy, teaching law at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, University of Lancaster, University of Nottingham, University of Canberra, and the Australian National University. She has also been devoted to women's rights, as from 1996 to 2002, she was the Chief of the Women's Rights Section in the Division for the Advancement of Women in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in

New York. In 2002, she joined the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as the Director of the Research and Right to Development Division. She also served as the International Advocacy Director Law and Policy for Amnesty International in Geneva. As she has said, "Victims are at the heart of our concerns" (Seguy, 2019).

On the panel, Connors underscored the message that victims have "the right to be respected, protected, receive assistance and support, decide how involved to be, enjoy privacy and confidentiality, be heard, get information, access justice, and accountability and remedies," and also to "complain if these rights aren't realized".



Ms. Suzie Miller is an Australian-British playwright,

screenwriter, and novelist. Her work has been disseminated around the world, winning multiple

awards and influencing positive change in various policies. With several degrees in science, law, drama, and mathematics, she practiced as a human rights lawyer before taking on writing full-time. Specifically, she pursued diverse fields, self-described as a "jack of all trades" beginning with an immunology and microbiology degree from Monash University in Australia, followed by earning a law degree from the University of New South Wales that evolved into work as a human rights lawyer and children's rights advocate. She concurrently studied playwriting at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, which developed into being the dramatist she is today. She was chosen as one of six writers that the Australian Writers' Guild and Screen Australia supports as 'The Creators,' a group of top-tier international Australian screenwriters.

Ms. Miller exemplified the agony of survivors of sexual abuse in her one-woman play *Prima Facie*. at the center of this panel.



Ms. Maria Nakabiito is currently the Senior Victims' Rights Officer in South Sudan with three decades of experience as a gender specialist globally. Previously, she served in the Government of

Uganda, and in many United Nations peacekeeping missions, agencies, funds, and programmes.



Ms. Catherine Pollard, a native of Guyana, assumed her role as Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy, and Compliance in 2019. Since 2022, she has served as Chair of the High-Level Committee on Management

for the United Nations system. Previously, she was Under-Secretary-General for the General Assembly and Conference Management, as well as Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, Chief of Staff in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and Director of the Peacekeeping Finance Division. In all positions, she helped to move management practices away from the status quo.



Ms. Kirsi Madi assumed the position of Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management, Sustainability, and Partnerships at UN Women on December 4,

2023. Previously, she served as Chief of Staff and

Director of the Office of the UNICEF Executive Director and Director of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Through her advocacy, Ms. Madi has always been a champion of gender equality and empowering women and girls internationally. Before joining the United Nations system, Ms. Madi served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

Background of Women's Rights at the United Nations

Halfway through the year 1946, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations developed the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), to promote gender equality and women's rights as human rights. This intergovernmental body is dedicated to strengthening and reaffirming a global commitment to the recognition of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and their inclusion in political and social dialogues (UN Women, n.d.). Any individual, non-governmental organization, group or network may submit complaints, appeals or petitions to CSW about alleged violations of human rights that affect the status of women in any country in the world (UN Communications procedure, n.d.). Some criticism has been leveled at CSW that the representation and responsiveness to diverse female populations and women's Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is "lower than it should be" (Rincker et. al, 2019). In response, much work by the UN has focused on combating alleged workplace violence. For example, victims of sexual abuse by United Nations uniformed and civilian staff have increasingly come forward with their experiences of abuse. As mentioned above in Ms. Jane Connor's bio sketch, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Australian academic and lawyer Connors (on this event panel) as the first Victims' Rights Advocate for the United Nations.

Alignment with International agreements

The event in this report, and the topic of the play at the center of the discussion, align with several of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda, specifically Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 calling for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Specifically, the panel discussion addressed in targeted 5.1, 5.2, and 5.c about, respectively, the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls, ending all forms of violence and exploitation (including sexual), and adopting enforceable legislation to promote the empowerment of women and girls.

The event also aligns with SDG 3 calling for Good Health and Well-being, and specifically target 3.4 about promoting mental health and well-being and target 3.7 which calls for access to sexual and reproductive education within the household for young boys and girls.

The issues addressed in the panel can also be considered to relate to Sustainable Development Goal 16, specifically target 16.2 with its call to protect children against abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence; target 16.3 to ensure equal access to justice; target 16.6 about developing accountable institutions; and target 16.7 to ensure representative decision-making for victims.

Importantly, the play and event relate to the General Assembly Resolution mentioned above spearheaded by Sierra Leone's First Lady Fatima Maada Bio, which is the first-ever General Assembly resolution to address access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, including rape. The resolution supports the First Lady's *"Hands Off Our Girls"* campaign, whereby protection of girls from violence has multiple positive outcomes in their physical and mental health and also ability to continue their education (with increases in exam scores and retention rates of young girls in school, to 69%). The resolution created a specialized sexual offenses court that deals exclusively with sex crimes, and increased jail sentences of offenders to a minimum of 15 years (Africa Renewal 2024).

Key Remarks from the Panel

The panelists had a back-and-forth discussion on the legal and social implications of rape. Points were raised about survivor guilt, the unfortunate under-reporting to law enforcement and stigma of victimhood.

The panelists leveled much criticism against the court system.

Ms. Connor said that the "law presents as fluid, dynamic and organic", yet has persistently failed to adapt to the protection of survivors. Legislation sequesters sexual assault as the only crime where the victim is interrogated, their every move and entire being isolated, questioned, and torn apart. The court system is a highly ordered entity that is inherently gendered; the laws are made by men, for men, and enforced through patriarchy.



Ms. Miller described the court of law as a system that protects sexual assault perpetrators, evident by her two consecutive years of experience taking six victim statements a week, none of which, for a plethora of reasons, ever reached court. She explained that the reason rape is so nuanced in a legal context has much to do with the fact that "the scene of the crime is the woman's body." The persistent neglect of victim credibility enhances the credibility of the perpetrator. Victim-blaming and rape-myths persist that hinder individual as well as societal pursuit of victim justice.

A clip was shown from *Prima Facie* where the character Tessa was at odds with herself as well as the legal system, when law enforcement neglected her explanation of her assault – similar to what happens to hundreds of thousands of women in real life.



Suzie Miller during the panel discussion (UN photo)

Ms. Miller mentioned an important concept of the "four Fs". Many people know two of the commonly known "F" responses to trauma: fight or flight. The other two "Fs", she explained, are freeze and friend. In describing these, she described the gender dichotomy that women do not have the fight-flight instinct the way men do because they cannot afford to. When faced with an attempted rape by a man, a woman cannot flee or fight because she very well may not survive. In contrast, she said, men who might be assaulted have the chance to survive unscathed if they resort to flight or to fight during which they may win or demolish their opponent. As a result, women have turned to other means of protection, leading to the remaining two Fs of freeze and friend.

Resorting to the tactic of "friend" when faced with an attack, she said, means that the woman ties to befriend her attacker. This can come in different forms, like ego-stroking, using flattery to subside anger of the perpetrator aroused from her saying "no", or feigned tenderness. This measure might not stop the rape but might keep her alive.

Many women being attacked freeze, disassociating her mind from her body as the crime unfolds (Dancu et. al, 1996).

Freeze and friend, Miller said, are protective measures, unlike fight and flight which may be categorized as preventative measures.

In response, Ms. Connors again raised legal issues, saying that, "Trespassing gardens is taken more seriously than sexual assault in a legal context."

The panelists all noted that more steps have been taken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic than for sexual assault.

After the showing of scenes from *Prima Facie*, Ms. Connors commented about the necessity of changing the mindset to center on victim's justice and not on the perpetrator. She emphasized the effectiveness of scenario-based discussions as tools to make every diplomat, doctor, lawyer, and person in any career under the sun, into being an *advocate first*.

Then, the panel shifted gears to discuss policy changes that have and hopefully will continue to come as a result of efforts on behalf of victims' rights. Ms. Pollard discussed that the task force at the UN is a good example of putting victims first systemically. For example, within the UN, preventing perpetrators from getting hired as well as holding them accountable for unresolved paternity claims is underway. The establishment of culpability, she said, is a salient measure that has engendered tangible progress regarding the dereliction of victims.

Conclusions

In concluding remarks, Ms. Miller mentioned the impact of her play *Prima Facie*, having earned well-deserved attention as a result of four Tony nominations, that fostered significant change in 25 countries across the globe. As an example, she said that in Northern Ireland, judges had to watch the one-woman show prior to hearing a sexual assault case. She described one of her successful actions, recounting a phone call with a legal actor, whereby she insisted on the need for judges to inform the jury of how problematic it is to immediately deem inadmissible a survivor's testament that may have chronological inconsistencies. She explained that the way an individual's mind processes trauma leaves room for error when it comes to recalling the specific

order of events. In other words, when a person is sexually assaulted, it is completely understandable and valid to mix up the chronology of the traumatic experience. Prior to this phone call, judges were not required to deliberately explain to a jury that sexual assault victims may have sequential irregularities and gaps in their stories. But now, she said, many victims have gotten justice by fact triers (juries, judges) because their trauma-induced amnesia is acknowledged as a real experience.

Ms. Pollard mentioned that while current progress deserves to be applauded, there is much more work to be done.

Ms. Madi emphasized the importance of recognizing sexual violence against women and girls across the globe and highlighted the desperate need for the victim-centered legislative approach, consistently assuming the innocence and honesty of the survivor.

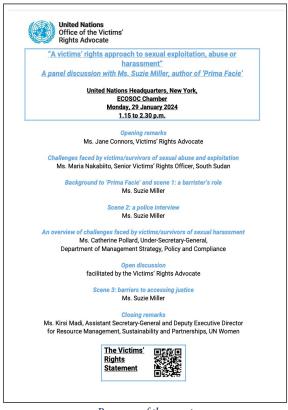
When discussing the next steps during this open forum discussion, Ms. Miller raised the point that sexual assault-specific trauma-informed specialty courts would be key players in an idyllic future. These would curb victims' stigma, retraumatization, and demoralization.

She also brought up the need for changes within the household, saying that at some point, boys cease listening to their mothers, so fathers must communicate the severity of sexual harassment to their sons.

As her conclusion, she cited the powerful words of her *Prima Facie*'s protagonist Tessa, that "somewhere, sometime, somehow, something has to change."

Q & A session

The panelists were posed four questions during this session.



Program of the event

Q1: What would be the impact, legally and interpersonally, if there were a shift in the burden of proof requiring the alleged offender to prove consent?

The panelists reflected that across most jurisdictions, the current burden of proof requires the victim to prove that a) they did not consent, and, b) the perpetrator knew that they did not consent. If this paradigm shift were to occur, the courtroom would be a new environment for the victim as they would no longer have to prove their state of mind as well as that of the perpetrator at the time of the crime.

Q2: Based on the reactions received after the play was performed, have you identified tangible actions that could be taken imminently or eventually to support the recognition of victims' rights?

The women on the panel agreed that educating judges is vital, since they are the ones with the

option to cease the perpetuation of rape myths (false or prejudicial beliefs about sexual violence) and preclude defaming and humiliating accusations against victims.

Q3: To what degree can materials like *Prima Facie* and other art forms be used within the United Nations to address challenges in administrative sexual misconduct, including in dispute and appeals tribunals?

Panelists underscored that scenario-based training has been immensely effective and should be used with a higher frequency. Direct situational confrontation allows staff the opportunity to have an open discussion of considerations and misconceptions. Presenting the play itself during such trainings would be beneficial to informing policies and programs to better address sexual misconduct through the victim-centered approach.

Q4: What next steps can be taken at the United Nations?

The panelists discussed considering the inclusion of psychologists in legal and administrative policy and decision-making regarding sexual misconduct. This would better incorporate the trauma-informed perspective to best adhere to the rights of victims. They also encouraged recurrent education on consent, particularly in the home as well as within early childhood school settings. This would engender safe spaces for dialogue on victimhood, acceptable behavior, and gender equality.

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Conflict Related Sexual Violence: Overview of history, definition and recent United Nations

report

Jenna Wettstein

Introduction

Sexual violence against civilians is widespread in conflict zones worldwide, leading to multi-level trauma for victims and the whole of society. From 1989 to 2019, sexual violence was prevalent in 61% of civil conflicts (Guarnieri & Tus-Prats, 2023). Research has revealed the tragical use of sexual violence as a weapon of war to instill fear, control populations, and demoralize communities. Sexual violence against women and girls, as well as men and boys, has been an unfortunate reality in armed conflicts across every region, spanning Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Since 2000, incidences of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been recorded in up to 90% of all conflicts annually (Nagel et al., 2021) Acts have been ordered, sanctioned, and perpetrated by military, police, armed groups, or other parties embroiled in conflict (Cherepanov, 2021). CRSV encompasses a wide range of offenses including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, or any other form of systemic sexual violence against women, men, girls, and boys (Cherepanov, 2021).

This paper gives a detailed overview on the history of CRSV, its definition, and current report by the United Nations Secretary-General in the most recent 2023 year.

Conflict Related Sexual Violence in History

Throughout history, armies have viewed rape as a legitimate war prize (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017), with sexual violence tacitly acknowledged as an unavoidable consequence of war. The history of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) extends back to ancient times. Rape has been observed as a feature of warfare across virtually all known historical periods, extending from the second millennium B.C. to contemporary times (Wilson & Cook, 2021). In ancient civilization, sexual violence was often used as a tool of conquest. The ancient Greeks viewed rape of women during war as socially acceptable behavior, falling well within the established rules of warfare. Conquering warriors regarded captured women as legitimate spoils, suitable for roles such as wives, concubines, slave labor, or even as trophies. From the Middle Ages to the 19th century, these attitudes and practices from ancient times prevailed. During medieval times in Europe, women held inferior legal status, receiving minimal protection even in peacetime. Soldiers, often paid irregularly by their commanders, saw opportunities for rape and plunder as advantages, as a measure of a soldier's masculinity, success, and tangible reward for their service. In this era, war-related rape was typically viewed not just as a deliberate strategy to terrorize the enemy but as earned compensation for military triumph.

In the first half of the 20th century, during the two major international conflicts of World War I and World War II, significant levels of sexual violence occurred, particularly against women in occupied territories (Wilson & Cook, 2021). Systematic rape and sexual slavery were used as tools of terror and control by occupying forces (Elshani, 2020). The Commission of Responsibilities in 1919 examined the WWI acts of cruelty committed the German Empire and other Central Powers during war and found significant evidence of sexual violence. Similarly, after WWII, the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials discovered substantial evidence of sexual violence. However, neither the Tokyo nor Nuremberg courts acknowledged sexual violence as a crime.

Military and political leaders alike historically misrepresented and disregarded rape and other

forms of sexual violence, viewing them as private offenses or the misconduct of rogue soldiers (Elshani, 2020). Conflict-related sexual violence continued to occur in various post-World War II conflicts, including during the Korean War, Vietnam War, and numerous conflicts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Wilson & Cook, 2021). In the second half of the 20th century, two conflicts produced wide scale CRSV, namely as rapes in the wars in the former Yugoslavia and during the Rwandan genocide (Heineman, 2008).

Legislation about Conflict Related Sexual Violence

The history of laws to address conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is marked by gradual recognition of the severity of the act and the need for accountability. Historically, international humanitarian law and human rights law lacked specific provisions addressing CRSV. In present times, governments regulate CRSV through a combination of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, which fall under its peace and security mandate outlined in the United Nations Charter. In the last twenty years, significant progress has been made within each of these legal frameworks to elucidate and reinforce states' responsibilities in preventing, halting, and addressing CRSV.

Over time, legislation has outlawed sexual violence, recognizing it as a crime against humanity and a war crime (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). A major shift towards laws protecting women and girls from violence began in 1992 when the UN Security Council deemed the widespread, organized, and systematic detention and rape of women in the former Yugoslavia as an international crime. This landmark decision laid the groundwork for more vigorous prosecution of conflict based sexual violence globally. Currently, conflictrelated sexual violence can qualify as a violation of both national criminal law and international law that constitutes a war crime, crime against humanity, or act of genocide even in the absence of death (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Among the earliest mentions of the "laws" of warfare is attributed to Roman philosopher and orator Cicero (106 B.C. to 43 B.C.) who implored soldiers to adhere to regulations to distinguish themselves as "men" rather than "brutes" (Wilson & Cook, 2021). However, for women, this renaming held little significance as they were regarded as property of men during that time. The laws of war considered the appropriation of an enemy's wealth and assets as lawful. Consequently, the violation of a woman through rape was viewed as a property crime against the woman's male "owner" rather than as a crime against the women themselves (Wilson & Cook, 2021).

Progress towards international humanitarian law began in 1863 with the enactment of the Lieber Code (Wilson & Cook, 2021), the first codification of the international customary laws governing land warfare, representing a significant stride toward humanitarian law. Notably, the code underscored the safeguarding of civilians and unequivocally declared that "all rape... [is] prohibited under the penalty of death," establishing the first formal prohibition of rape in customary humanitarian law (Wilson & Cook, 2021). In 1949, the Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly prohibited wartime rape and enforced prosecution (Cherepanov, 2021). However, it wasn't till long after WWII that there was official recognition of wartime violations.

In 1993, the United Nations Security Council established the ad hoc court of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) through Resolution 827 (Wilson & Cook, 2021). This codified wartime sexual violence as an international war crime. This caused a shift in global focus that prompted international political will to prosecute rape and other forms of sexual violence as an international war crime. This pivotal ruling marked a milestone in efforts to prevent and prosecute CRSV. It was the first international tribunal to preside over trials of defendants accused of committing violations of international law and the first court to hear a case solely on the charges of sexual violence as a crime

against humanity. War rape was first prosecuted by ICTY through the discovery of rape camps used by Serb soldier during the Bosnian war in former Yugoslavia (Wilson & Cook, 2021). Almost half of all individuals convicted by the ICTY have been found guilty of offenses involving sexual violence (Germain & Dewey, 2013).

In 1994, the UN Security Council Resolution 955 created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to prosecute individuals for war crimes (Wilson & Cook, 2021). Similar to the ICTY, over half of the ICTR convictions include aspects of crimes involving sexual violence (Germain & Dewey, 2013). Extensive media attention on both trials heightened global awareness and triggered international outrage against war rape. Consequently, discussing rape in conflict became less stigmatized, and prioritizing support for survivors gained momentum (Cherepanov, 2021).

The year 1998 marked a milestone in legislation for CRSV through the adoption of the Rome Statute adopted at the Rome Conference in July when Governments assembled for this diplomatic conference and voted to establish a permanent International Criminal Court (UN, 1998). The 1988 Rome Statute marked the international legal recognition of rape and other widespread and systematic sexual violence as international crimes (UN, 1998).

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted its first resolution on Women, Peace, and Security (Olsson et al., 2020). This groundbreaking Resolution 1325 specifically addressed the effects of armed conflict on women and girls and the need to promote their rights to protection and participation in peace and security. This was the first resolution to acknowledge the association between violence against women and international peace and security (Olsson et al., 2020).

In July 2002, 66 countries ratified the Rome Statute, officially establishing the International Criminal

Court (ICC) (Germain & Dewey, 2013). Under the governing framework of the Rome Statute, the Court has jurisdiction over four categories of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. The purpose of the ICC is to investigate and prosecute war crimes. It recognizes the potential accountability of not only the perpetrators but also their military commanders for acts of sexual violence in conflict. The Rome Statute mandates the ICC to identify conflict-related sexual violence as a crime against humanity (Germain & Dewey, 2013).

March 2007 saw the launch of the United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict body aimed at streamlining efforts across 13 United Nations entities and intensifying initiatives to combat CRSV (Action, 2010). The creation of UN Action was a response to internal UN appeals, as well as demands from women's rights groups, NGOs, and Member States, urging for heightened political recognition of sexual violence as a challenge to peace and security, and as a matter concerning humanitarian aid, human rights, gender equality and development (Action, 2010).

In 2008, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights passed the Resolution 1820, marking the first acknowledgment of sexual violence in armed conflict as a threat to international peace and security. This resolution recognized CRSV as a tactic of war (Russo, 2022).

The following year, Resolution 1888 was adopted that assigned a dedicated Special Representative of the Secretary-General tasked with addressing CRSV (Russo, 2022). The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has three priorities: (1) transforming cultures of impunity into cultures of prevention and deterrence, notably through measures of justice and accountability, (2) tackling the underlying structural gender inequalities that serve as the fundamental

and often overlooked catalyst for sexual violence in both wartime and peacetime scenarios and (3) cultivating national commitment and leadership to ensure a sustainable, comprehensive, and survivorcentered approach (UN, 2009).

These objectives led to the establishment of the United Nations (UN) Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. The primary objective of this initiative is to support national authorities in enhancing the rule of law to achieve criminal accountability for perpetrators of conflictrelated sexual violence (CRSV). By acknowledging CRSV as a significant threat to peace and security, the resolution underscores the necessity of assisting Member States affected by conflict in addressing impunity to prevent and discourage future violations (UN, 2009).

From 2010 to 2015, additional resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security were adopted, each containing specific reference of action required of the UN Security Council to hear reports on situations where sexual violence is taking place. Resolution 1960 (2010) established a monitoring and reporting mechanisms for CRSV. Resolution 2160 (2013) stresses accountability for perpetrators of conflictrelated sexual violence (Russo, 2022). Resolution 2106 first recognized men and boys as survivors of CRSV.

Moreover, the Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) was established in response to the Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010) to focus specifically on CRSV in guaranteeing the systematic collection of accurate and reliable data in a timely manner on conflict-related sexual violence targeting women, men, and children in all areas of concern (Russo, 2022).

In 2013, delegates of the G8 summit declared their acknowledgment of the necessity to strengthen the UN initiatives against CRSV and pledged their support to this endeavor (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013). Further political collaboration followed

in 2014. London convened The *Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict*. During the summit, participants advocated for improved documentation of CRSV and unveiled a tool, the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, intended to aid governmental and non-governmental organizations alike (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014).

Additionally, the UN Secretary-General adopted a Guidance Note on Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (Russo, 2022). Two years later, in 2016, the ICC delivered its first conviction against an individual, Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his responsibility over soldiers who committed acts of CRSV (Stachow, 2020). Despite this win for the survivors and victims of CRSV in the DRC, he was subsequently acquitted of these convictions following an appeal (UNSC, 2019).

Even with the increased accountability of CRSV, perpetrators still find their way around legal repercussions. In spite of these obstacles, progress has been made in the legal action against CRSV and barriers have been broken with each landmark case. In response to these obstacles, the UNSC adopted Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019) that reinforces efforts toward justice and accountability and advocates for a survivor-centered approach in the prevention and response to CRSV (Russo, 2022). This resolution further recognizes the victimization of men and boys by sexual violence and urges member states to enhance policies and challenge cultural beliefs regarding men's vulnerability to such violence (Russo, 2022).

The UN Security Council has consistently pursued investigations into and condemnation of CRSV. Noteworthy are the special measures and strict sanctions announced by the UN Secretary-General against any UN personnel found guilty of perpetrating acts of sexual violence.

While landmark trials such as those conducted by the ICTY have heightened awareness of the seriousness and consequences of committing sexual violence in conflict, the international community has been criticized for making limited progress in reducing CRSV. While the incorporation of sexual violence into international law is a significant advancement, perpetrators continue to find the immediate and enduring effects of sexual violence to outweigh potential legal ramifications or sanctioning regimes.

Defining Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Conflict related sexual violence constitutes a serious human rights violation which is endemic even in peace-time, although armed conflict increases the risk of its occurrence (OSCE, n.d.). CRSC occurs within the framework of gender-based power dynamics, where men exert control and/or power over women. While predominantly perpetrated by men against women and girls, during conflicts, boys and men also become targets. In these situations, sexual violence might be commanded or condoned as a strategic tool of warfare (World Health Organization, 2012). Conflicts intensify power imbalances and societal inequalities, creating an environment where violence becomes normalized, thereby facilitating instances of conflict-related sexual violence. The current United Nations Secretary-General Antonio-Guterres defines the term conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as the" rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to conflict" (Guterres, 2024). The definition also encompasses the trafficking of individuals for the purpose of sexual violence and/or exploitation, when occurring within the context of armed conflict. CRSV can transpire within the victim's residence, agricultural fields, at checkpoints, or within places of detention (including during interrogation), as well as in military or refugee encampments (Stachow, 2020).

To assess whether sexual violence is conflict-related, it is necessary to determine a direct or indirect link to the conflict. In one conceptualization, for acts of sexual violence to be conflict-related, at least two of these three links should be established: a temporal link, a geographic link, or a causal link (United Nations, 2020).

A temporal link requires proximity between the sexual violent acts and the period of conflict, with the incident occurring either before or after the conflict. Sexual violence before conflict can be considered as conflict related if it occurred in the period of instability that escalated to armed conflict. Sexual violence that occurred after conflict is considered conflict related when it takes place in the aftermath of the conflict but before the complete restoration of State authority. Sexual violence committed against individuals who are deprived of their freedom in the context of a conflict can also be categorized as conflict-related sexual violence.

A geographic link requires that incidents of sexual violence take place within areas affected by conflict, encompassing regions of active warfare as well as areas impacted by conflict. These impacts can extend to specific portions of a territory, border areas, or entire geographical regions.

A casual link requires evaluating how pre-existing levels of sexual violence are influenced by the conditions of conflict and subsequent displacement of populations and detentions. It must be assessed whether instances of sexual violence are associated with the breakdown of law and order due to conflict, thereby qualifying as conflict-related, or if they represent unrelated criminal behavior (United Nations, 2020).

Other factors. Additionally, other factors need to be considered in the definition of CRSC. These include the role of conflict in facilitating the perpetrator's ability to commit sexual violence, the manner in which it was carried out, and the underlying motive (United Nations, 2020). Additionally, situations of

political instability or other pressing concerns which fall short of armed conflict warrant consideration.

Additionally, the profile of the perpetrator and the profile of the victim/survivor can help determine whether an act of sexual violence is conflict related.

In considering the profile of perpetrators, perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence are typically affiliated with State or Non-state operation. These can be national armed forces, police, security forces, terrorist organizations or networks, local militias, armed groups, or traffickers. Perpetrator profiles may become apparent through their uniform, insignia, distinctive methods of operation, or recognizable patterns of abuse affiliated with particular groups. CRSV can be committed by an individual or by a group (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Perpetrators are predominantly male, however females have played active roles in CRSV including both in perpetration and facilitation (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017).

Also, determining the profile of victims/survivors is important to establish the link between sexual violence and conflict.

All these factors can vary in each situation and contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics of conflict-related sexual violence and the distinct risks confronting communities.

Conflict-related sexual violence frequently occurs alongside other violations and abuses against civilians (United Nations, 2020). Individuals may be targeted due to their actual or perceived affiliation with a political, ethnic, or religious minority group, or based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, those suspected of engaging in activities deemed threatening to parties involved in the conflict, such as journalists and human rights defenders, including women's rights activists, may also be targeted. While anyone can be affected by CRSV and it is not a gender-specific practice, women and girls remain disproportionately impacted and are the primary targets of CRSV. This is due to the persistent discrimination and violence women and girls experienced even before the onset of conflict or political turmoil. Additionally, refugees and displaced individuals, unaccompanied or separated children, orphans, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI individuals face elevated vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence. Victims and survivors of CRSV may also encompass women and men serving as combatants, as well as children forcibly recruited into armed groups (United Nations, 2020).

Criteria about the environment that defines CRSV

Common environments that meet the criteria for CRSV are climates of impunity, state collapses, crossborder consequences, and violations of ceasefire agreements. The collapse of government authority and the rule of law are fundamental factors fostering an environment of impunity, enabling sexual violence. When national authorities fail to investigate and prosecute sexual violence committed by parties involved in the conflict or lack effective control over the territory, it signifies the breakdown of the State. Conflict-related sexual violence also serves as both a catalyst for and a consequence of forced displacement, whether within a nation's borders or across them. For instance, perpetrators may employ CRSV as a means to forcibly relocate communities in order to appropriate land and resources. Within refugee and internally displaced persons camps, victims/survivors may face sexual violence at the hands of state authorities, armed groups, traffickers, and smugglers who exert control over essential resources and services, as well as from other local or displaced individuals. The United Nations Security Council has acknowledged the interconnectedness between conflict-related sexual violence, trafficking, and violent extremism. Additionally, sexual violence is often employed as a strategy or tool of warfare, underscoring the necessity for its inclusion in comprehensive and robust ceasefire and peace agreements. The ongoing occurrence of conflictrelated sexual violence in spite of peace agreements

calls for vigilant monitoring and intervention, considering it as both a matter of security and a breach of the pertinent clauses within the agreements (United Nations, 2020).

Motives for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Groups and individuals commit CRSV for a variety of reasons, including as a deliberate tactic of war, an act of opportunism, a means to compensate troops, to foster group solidarity, or as a tool for ethnic eradication (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Understanding the motives driving perpetrators can aid in establishing the connection between sexual violence and the conflict at hand as well as improve responses to the practice in its differing contexts.

CRSV as a Tactic of War

CRSV can be used as a deliberate tactic of war to terrorize civilians (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). These strategies reflect the issues of the broader conflict in that they involve the selective targeting of victims from rival ethnic, religious, or political groups. The rationale of using CRSV as a tactic of war is in its brutality and resulting shame and stigma endured by survivors. Armed groups, extremists, and individual perpetrators wield CRSV as a weapon to slander enemies and instill fear. Some extremist groups have adopted CRSV as a core element of their ideology and operation. They use sexual violence to force populations into compliance, remove civilians from strategic areas, and to embed an ideology aimed at subduing women's rights to regulate reproduction and exploit their labor (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). For example, persecutory rape, including gang rape and multiple rape, has been systematically employed by state authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to punish politically engaged women, in efforts to silence their voices on matters concerning politics, human rights, and even the issue of rape itself (Cherepanov, 2021).

CRSV is also carried out by state forces, armed groups, and terrorists as a from of torture against captured

hostiles and their relatives and civilians. In these settings, CRSV is used as tool to gain enemy intel and inflict punishment (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). According to a recent UN report, this is a common practice used by Syrian government forces and allied militias (UN, 2016) who have perpetrated rape and sexual assault against numerous women, girls, and men as part of a systematic effort to retaliate against opposition groups. Sexual violence targeting both females and males serves as a means to coerce confessions, extract information, administer punishment, and instill fear within opposition communities (UN, 2016).

CRSV as Opportunism

Sexual violence in conflict may also escalate without a specific plan, as opportunism within a command hierarchy (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Instances of state collapse and the breakdown of established political, legal, economic, and social structures have been observed to fuel sexual violence perpetrated by state armed groups, rebel groups, peacekeeping and security forces, as well as civilians during periods of turmoil. Often, sexual violence intertwines with other crimes against civilians, such as looting and killing, among both state and non-state entities. Perpetrators take advantage of the breakdown of law and order, the displacement of communities, or the absence of protection mechanisms to carry out sexual violence. The chaos of conflict is seen as an opportunity to assert power, instill fear, or achieve other objectives through sexual violence. State forces may utilize sexual violence either as a deliberate tactic or as an opportunistic measure within detention centers and in operations targeting civilians, such as in urban warfare scenarios, house raids, and at checkpoints. Unfortunately, there have been allegations of peacekeepers and security forces using sexual violence against highly vulnerable populations when under their protection (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Previously, this has involved exchanging money, food, aid items, or privileges for sexual favors, as well as engaging in sexual acts

with minors (Bastick et al., 2007). Opportunistic perpetrators may not necessarily have a premeditated plan to commit sexual violence but seize the chance presented by the circumstances of conflict to carry out such acts.

CRSV as Payment and Incentives

CRSV can play a role as currency whereby women and girls are treated as payment or rewards for fighters and are given implicitly or explicitly in exchange for enlistment or service (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). For example, pro-governmetn militias in South Sudan were reportedly allowed to rape women in place of government payment. Several extremists groups recruit young men by offering sexual compensation through promises of "wives" or sex slaves. Armed groups that use abduction or "press-ganging" (a detachment under command of an officer empowered to force men into service) to recruit fighters are more likely to perpetrate rape. Research analyzing 91 civil conflicts revealed that both state and non-state entities resorting to coercive recruitment methods were markedly more prone to committing rape against civilians. Groups resorting to abduction for recruitment generally exhibit low internal social cohesion and consequently resort to sexual violence, particularly gang rape, as a means to forge social bonds among the unit (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Such violence has been documented as torture, for example, of political detainees in the Baghdad detention center in Iraq (Cherepanov, 2021), allegedly enduring rape, being hung upside-down, asphyxiation, severe beatings, electric shocks to their genitals, and sodomization with various objects (Cherepanov, 2021).

CRSV for Ethnic Destruction/Genocide

At its most extreme, mass rape is employed by armed groups as a component of a larger strategy aimed at ethnical cleansing of a perceived enemy (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). Acts of sexual violence are used to spread fear among civilian populations belonging to a specific national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, to forcibly displace them, and to impose pregnancies aimed at altering the targeted population's lineage, thereby seeking to eradicate future generations (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017). HIV-positive soliders have been ordered to spread HIV in conflict through sexual assault as a means facilitate genocide and ethnic cleansing (Cherepanov, 2021; Tol et al., 2013). The mass rapes that characterized events such as the Bangladesh Liberation War, the Yugoslav conflicts, and the Rwandan genocide catapulted the notion of genocidal rape into global attention (Cherepanov, 2021; Tol et al., 2013)

Consequences of CRSV

The effects of CRSV on survivors encompasses various dimensions of physical health, mental health, and social and economic consequences, with primary and intergenerational impacts. Physical health consequences include unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health complications such as fistula (Aolain et al., 2015). Mental health challenges include enduring trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression (Koos & Traunmuller, 2022). Unique social and economic consequences include barriers to employment or marriage due to the physical and social impact of these harms (Aolain et al., 2015). Additionally, stigma arising from CRSV can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes, social rejection, and exclusion from both family and community. All these can result in isolation, poverty, and increased susceptibility to further exploitation and abuse, especially for women (Aolain et al., 2015).

Ba & Bhopal (2017) conducted the first systematic review of war-related sexual violence on civilians, starting from the year 1981, in 20 studies from six counties, primarily in Africa. The findings showed that entire communities are at risk to CRSV, regardless of gender, age, education, occupation, or marital status. Gang rape, rape, and abduction were the most frequently reported types of CRSV against makes and females, with the latter also subjected to . sexual slavery. Survivors frequently experienced torture

prior to, during, or following instances of sexual violence. With regard to consequences of CRSV, , the most common physical consequences were unwanted pregnancy, traumatic genital injuries/ tears, fistule, and sexual problems/dysfunction; the most commonly reported mental health consequences were post-traumatic stress disorder (56%), depression (49%), and anxiety, feelings of shame, anger and guilt, as well as sexual dysfunction (35%; and common social consequences (39%) were stigmatization by family and/or their community. In addition, many survivors are burdened with the responsibility of raising unwanted children, often without adequate family or community assistance. These unwanted children often face societal stigma and are especially susceptible to adverse conditions such as malnutrition, lack of education, exploitation, and social exclusion.

The review highlighted the importance of integrating men as survivors in conceptualizations of sexual violence and providing support to victims.

Though survivors face all these documented negative outcomes, the studies showed limited availability and access to care, and even restricted care-seeking (Ba & Bhoopal, 2017).

CRSV creates a pervasive trauma that extends beyond individual victims and communities, disrupting social connections and fostering a cycle of violence. Victims often face significant barriers to reporting these crimes, including fear of reprisal, social stigma, and cultural taboos (Cherepanov, 2021). Perpetrators, often associated with state institutions, operate with impunity, further perpetuating the culture of silence. This cycle obstructs post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, as victims struggle to move forward while their perpetrators remain unpunished (Cherepanov, 2021). In post-conflict settings, challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and social isolation can exacerbate interpersonal and sexual violence (Bastick et al., 2007). Conflict-affected areas suffer from an absence of viable economic prospects and weakened legal structures. These vulnerabilities in societal structures heighten the risk of sexual exploitation for women and girls, while also making both men and women more susceptible to trafficking (Bastick et al., 2007).

The social taboo attached to crimes of sexual harm in many societies is considerable. Overall, the extensive scope and severity of consequences, coupled with the societal views and stigma attached to the experience, intensify the deleterious impact of these experiences of CRSV survivors, resulting in immediate, mediumterm, and long-lasting consequences for women, men, boys, and girls.

Vulnerable Groups

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) affects a wide range of vulnerable groups, including women, men, girls, and boys, during armed conflicts and forced migration. Women and girls are often primary targets, experiencing rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and other forms of sexual violence as tactics of war. However, men and boys are also at risk, particularly when in detention or forcibly recruited by armed groups. Children, regardless of gender, are especially vulnerable, facing sexual exploitation, abduction, and recruitment into armed forces or groups. Additionally, marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees, and internally displaced persons face heightened risks of CRSV due to intersecting factors of discrimination, displacement, and insecurity. Addressing CRSV requires comprehensive strategies that consider the diverse vulnerabilities of these groups and prioritize their protection and support in conflict-affected settings.

Women and Children

Sexual violence against women and girls occurs frequently during routine tasks like fetching food, water, or firewood. They are often abducted by armed groups, forced into sexual slavery, or even forced into combat roles (Bastick et al., 2007). In times of armed conflict or displacement, families are frequently

separated, leaving children without the protection of their relatives (Miller, 2013). These vulnerable children are often targeted and subjected to various forms of abuse and sexual exploitation. Some of these children are coerced into military service after being exploited (Cherepanov, 2021).

Men

While conflict-related sexual violence predominantly affects women and girls, it's important to recognize that men and boys also face significant risks, especially when detained or forcibly recruited by armed groups. (Bastick et al., 2007). The motivations behind sexual violence against men often aim to demean, feminize, and emasculate the victim (Solangon & Patel, 2012). Sexual violence against men in armed conflict has been documented in over 25 armed conflict worldwide (Solangon & Patel, 2012). During the period between January 1997 and June 1998, a collection of reports from detainees across different nations revealed that over 25% had experienced sexual abuse, with about 5% subjected to rape (Peel, 2004). In Afghanistan, boys have been victims of sexual abuse and exploitation by both armed forces and groups, often being forced into roles as sexual slaves (Solangon & Patel, 2012) The Bosnian war highlighted the prevalence of CRSV against men in which a shocking 80% of men from one concentration camp reported being raped (Mudrovcic, 2001). However, even though sexual violence against men during conflict is widespread, it is frequently silenced due to its taboo nature. Often, it is categorized under the broader term of 'torture,' obscuring its distinct and pervasive presence (Sologan & Patel, 2012).

Also, men often do not disclose their experiences with sexual violence during conflict because of the extreme shame, humiliation, guilt, fear, and overwhelming stigma associated with male-to-male violence (Sivakumaran, 2007). Socially, men and boys subjected to sexual violence can face ostracism from their communities, labeled derogatory terms like 'bush wives,' emasculated, humiliated, and sometimes even blamed for the assault hindering their ability to successfully reintegrate (Sivakumaran, 2007). In several developing countries with patriarchal societies, gender roles are strictly defined (Natabaalo, 2013), with the result thatmen who experience rape often face the stigma associated with homosexuality, which is condemned or even persecuted in many countries. As a result, men may refrain from seeking help or speaking out about their experiences for fear of being labeled as gay, thereby hindering their access to necessary support services (Natabaalo, 2013). Researchers agree that more research and advocacy for male victims of CRVS needs to be done to fully understand the dynamics of CRSV and to offer effective care for male survivors of such violence.

Child Soldiers

Child soldiers are also vulnerable to CRSV. UNICEF defines a child soldier as " any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity (UNICEF, 2007)," In some countries, both boys and girls have been abducted and raped when forcibly recruited into armed groups, and suffer repeated sexual abuse at the hands of their captors. Additionally, females have been subjected to captivity as sexual slaves or becoming what is called "wives" of combatants (Bastick et al., 2007). In 2016, the UN declared its goal to protect children from the brutalities of war (UN 2016). However, despite international efforts, children continue to be recruited and sexually abused in many countries, including Afghanistan, Chad, the DRC, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. Particularly, Militant Islamist organizations like ISIS and Boko Haram have used children extensively in conflict (UN, 2016). The effects on female child soldiers are particularly detrimental in post-conflict reintegration, likely to experience PTSD, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem and face strong stigmatization (Betancourt et al., 2014). Further, they are viewed as tainted by sexual relationships that occurred outside of marriage, experience verbal and physical

attacks and the community, and are prohibited from marrying (Wessels, 2009).

Refugees

Even supposed places of safety, like refugee camps, can be perilous environments where sexual violence takes place among refugees and displaced individuals. By the time refugees reach their country of refugee, it is very likely that they will have endured CRSV (Cherepanov, 2021). Both women and men in detention have reported incidents of rape, sexual mutilation, humiliation, and torture (Bastick et al., 2007). The Refugee Council Report (2009) noted that women are at high risk during the refugee cycle of experiencing rape, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation.

Gender and Ethnicity

Aan intersection between gender and ethnicity reflects vulnerability to sexual violence across various countires. Indigenous or people from specific population groups may face targeted sexual violence due to their ethnicity or may be at heightened risk due to other factors during conflict (Bastick et al., 2007). In certain armed conflicts, individuals such as single women, homosexuals, female heads of households, and displaced women and children have been notably vulnerable to sexual violence (Bastick et al., 2007).

The United Nations Report on Conflict Related Sexual Violence

Given all the dire issues reported to occur worldwide concerning CRSV, the United Nations Secretary-General issues an annual report about this topic. This section of this paper reports on the most recent of these reports, issued in 2024 about the year 2023 (Guterres, 2024).

The report details instances of conflict-related sexual violence confirmed by the United Nations and resulting recommendations. While it underscores the severity and cruelty of documented incidents, it does

not claim to represent the overall global extent and frequency of this crime.

In the report, the year 2023 brought an escalation and outbreak of CRSV among conflict-exposed civilians and persisted as a method of warfare, torture, and terrorism, attributable to heightened militarization, illicit arms proliferation, and unprecedented levels of displacement both internally and across borders. This phenomenon hindered or prematurely halted the progress of peace and political initiatives in conflict-stricken regions such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan, and Sudan. Perpetrators of sexual violence in regions like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Sudan were often weapon bearers, indicating a direct link between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and incidents of sexual violence. In fact, approximately 70-90% of incidents of CRSV were noted as involving small arms and light weapons. The widespread availability of such weaponry fueled armed conflicts, creating conditions that facilitated sexual violence and allowed perpetrators to act with impunity.

Both State and non-State armed groups were reported to have engaged in targeting civilians through acts of rape, gang rape, and abductions, contributing to unprecedented levels of displacement within and across borders. Various non-state armed groups, including those designated as terrorist organizations by the United Nations, as well as transnational criminal networks, employed sexual violence strategically to recruit members and assert control over territories rich in valuable natural resources. Additionally, armed and violent extremist groups capitalized on sexual violence, exploiting it as a means to generate profits, particularly through trafficking individuals for sexual exploitation driven by the conflict (Guterres, 2024).

In various conflict-affected regions such as Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, displaced, refugee, and migrant women

and girls endured heightened levels of conflictrelated sexual violence, perpetrated by armed actors (Guterres, 2024). Ukraine, with its protracted displacement crisis, saw an ongoing risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation among its predominantly female and child refugee population, numbering in the millions. Particularly alarming were reports from Libya and Yemen, where migrant and refugee women and girls, especially those detained, faced increased vulnerability to sexual violence. In Afghanistan, food insecurity compounded existing challenges, exacerbating harmful coping mechanisms like forced and child marriage, as policies further restricted women's education and economic opportunities. Meanwhile, in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed conflicts triggered mass displacement, leading to a stark rise in sexual and gender-based violence within and around displacement sites. Economic desperation forced displaced women and girls into prostitution for survival. In Libya, reports emerged of detained displaced individuals, including women and girls, enduring sexual abuse in exchange for food. This pattern underscores the intertwined dynamics between food insecurity and sexual violence, where the latter not only heightens the risk of poverty and food insecurity but also perpetuates socioeconomic marginalization (Guterres, 2024).

Sexual violence and exploitation, often associated with abduction and trafficking, persisted in conflictaffected areas characterized by weak rule of law and State authority. This included instances reported in regions where non-State armed groups and criminal gangs operated. In Colombia, for example, sexual violence led to the forcible displacement of women and girls, particularly prevalent in border areas heavily impacted by conflict-driven trafficking. Mali witnessed mass displacement due to armed conflict, heightening the vulnerability of women and girls to abduction, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and forced marriage amid persistent attacks by armed groups. In South Sudan, abduction, sexual slavery, and forced marriage were employed as forms of collective punishment against rival communities. Similarly, reports from Sudan indicated the abduction of women and girls from Khartoum to other regions, notably Darfur. In the Central African Republic and Mozambique, non-State armed groups abducted women and girls, subjecting them to sexual slavery often for extended periods. Upon release, survivors remained at risk of enduring long-term health and psychological consequences.

The UN report details a wide array of cases involving individuals of diverse backgrounds, including women, girls, men, boys, and individuals with varied sexual orientations, gender identities, race, ethnicity, and disabilities, ranging from 3 to 70 years of age (Guterres, 2024). Instances of conflict-related sexual violence targeted women and girls in their homes, on roads, and during essential livelihood activities, with incidents reported in Cameroon, Libya, and Mozambigue. These acts often involved extreme physical violence, leading to lethal injuries or the insertion of objects into victims' bodies. In some cases, victims were subjected to summary executions following rape, as observed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar in 2023. Men and boys faced sexual violence primarily in detention settings, including rape, threats of rape, and genital mutilation through electrocution or beating. Additionally, individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gueer, and intersex were at acute risk to sexual violence, often experiencing persecution in conflict-affected and displacement settings. Instances of conflict-related sexual violence leading to pregnancy were frequently documented in cases involving abduction, recruitment, sexual slavery, and forced marriage during periods of captivity. Survivors facing such circumstances are often viewed as associated with armed groups, leading to their exclusion from community networks and a subsequent descent into poverty (Guterres, 2024).

The societal stigma surrounding sexual violence persisted, leading to the exclusion of survivors from

socioeconomic opportunities (Guterres, 2024). In regions like the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Somalia, instances of sexual violence strained familial bonds and social networks. Survivors often faced victim-blaming, experiencing rejection from spouses and relatives in the aftermath of assaults. In contexts such as Iraq and Mozambigue, returning former abductees and their children encountered challenges in reintegrating due to entrenched social norms and stigma. Similarly, in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, women subjected to detention were often stigmatized, facing potential rejection by their families and communities due to presumptions of rape victimization. Additionally, impunity continued to prevail concerning conflictrelated sexual violence. The absence of formal accountability mechanisms frequently led to reliance on customary justice systems, which, as evidenced in Somalia and South Sudan, often fail survivors. Moreover, accessing the formal justice system proves challenging for many victims due to various barriers such as lack of legal aid and the considerable distances to competent authorities. Security risks and financial burdens associated with travel and legal proceedings further hinder victims' access to justice.

An important conflict addressed in the rep[ort is the Palestine-Israeli conflict. According to data collected from various reliable sources by the Office of the Special Respresentative of the SGSVC mission team, evidence suggests that conflict-related sexual violence took place during the attacks on October 7 in several areas around the Gaza periphery (Office of the SGSVC, 2024). This violence included instances of rape and gang rape reported in at least three different locations. The mission team observed that in various areas targeted during the October 7 attacks, multiple fully or partially naked bodies, predominantly of women, were discovered. These individuals had their hands tied and had been subjected to multiple gunshot wounds, frequently in the head. The mission team also examined reported incidents of alleged sexual violence involving hostages in Gaza. Drawing from firsthand testimonies provided by released hostages, the team received compelling and credible information indicating that some women and children experienced sexual violence, including rape, sexualized torture, and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment while in captivity. While the mission team could not determine the exact extent of sexual violence, noting that a thorough investigation is needed to ascertain the overall scale, breadth, and perpetrators of these violations, the report notes that this violence is likely still occurring. A comprehensive inquiry would allow for gathering information from areas inaccessible to the team and establishing trust with survivors of the conflict-related sexual violence who may currently be hesitant to come forward.

These findings call for the United Nations to enhance their ability to track and document incidents, patterns, and changes in conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory (Office of the SGSVC, 2024). The UN Report concluded that it is reasonable to believe that the CRSV will continue until all parties of the conflict comply to a humanitarian ceasefire. It further asserts that it is imperative that the implementation of ceasefire and political agreements be informed by expertise on addressing CRSV to progress towards survivor-centered conflict resolutions and peacebuilding.

Overall, the report notes that conflict-related sexual violence persisted as an entrenched aspect of the political economy of war. The year 2023 saw a 50% increase from the last reporting cycle with the highest numbers reported in Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Guterres, 2024). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been a persistent and devastating issue for decades and int he region of Tigray in Ethiopia, systematic and widespread use of CRSV by armed forces and militias continued. Fifty-eight parties were credibly

suspected of committing or being responsible of CRSV, with the vast majority being non-state actors, several of which are designated terrorist groups. Despite the comprehensive framework established by the Security Council since 2008, compliance with relevant international norms among conflict parties remained inadequate. A significant majority, exceeding 70%, of the parties listed in the report persist as perpetrators, having appeared in the annex for five or more consecutive years without implementing remedial measures or corrective actions.

Notably, this continued prevalence of sexual violence has not only disrupted women's ability to sustain their livelihoods but also hindered girls' access to education. Women and girls remained vulnerable to attacks while engaging in critical economic and livelihood pursuits, specifically in regions such as the Central African Republic, Haiti, and Somalia. It is important to recognize that men and boys as well as LBGTQI individuals also are growing more vulnerable to CRSV. Moreover, food insecurity became an emerging issue which exacerbated the vulnerability of populations to sexual violence, especially within the context of displacement (Guterres, 2024).

Recommendations

Improving the response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach.

First, it is essential to strengthen legal frameworks and ensure accountability for perpetrators through effective prosecution and adjudication processes. This involves enhancing the capacity of national judicial systems to investigate and prosecute CRSV cases, as well as supporting international mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, to hold perpetrators accountable.

Second, efforts should focus on prevention strategies, including addressing root causes of conflict, promoting gender equality, and combating

impunity. Providing education and training on gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding is crucial in changing social norms and attitudes towards sexual violence.

Additionally, there is a need to prioritize the protection and support of survivors by providing access to medical care, psychosocial support, legal aid, and economic empowerment programs.

Collaborative initiatives involving governments, civil society organizations, international agencies, and local communities are essential for addressing CRSV comprehensively and effectively.

Finally, raising awareness and mobilizing political will at both national and international levels are vital for sustaining efforts to combat CRSV and promote peace and security globally.

Overall, the report recommends a fundamental shift in gendered power dynamics, including across ceasefire agreements, political processes, security sector reform, and arms control measures (Guterres, 2024). Specifically, political and diplomatic engagements must prioritize including sexual violence as prohibited in ceasefire agreements and ensure its monitoring, compliance and prevention. Arms control measures should include comprehensive risk assessments to prevent the export of arms that could facilitate gender-based violence.

Additionally, to address survivor needs requires recognizing their diverse experiences and developing survivor-centered approaches, tackle root causes such as structural gender inequality and harmful social norms, and promote women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Guterres, 2024).

Ultimately, transforming gendered power dynamics is integral to eliminating all forms of violence against women, including CRSV, and achieving gender equality in peace and security initiatives. States must

uphold women's equal rights and strive for the equal participation of women while addressing gendered dynamics of conflict.

Although this 2024 report of CRSV over the year 2023 focused on the negatives, it asserts that positive steps have been taken to enhance people's well-being and mitigate threats to human security, including for survivors of CRSV. However, numerous national and regional factors hinder the UN efforts to protect, prevent, and facilitate participation to tackle CRSV, such as limited budgets, proliferation of conflict situations, threats to security, practical challenges and accessibility. These factors need to be addressed concurrently with direct efforts to combat CRSV.

Conclusion

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has persisted throughout history, reflecting complex origins and challenges in addressing and preventing this abuse. Recent years have seen growing global recognition of CRSV, accompanied by increased political and judicial responses. Despite these efforts, CRSV continues to persist. Therefore, it is crucial to continuously monitor the incidences of CRSV to facilitate the protection of potential victims as well as effective responses to occurrences and allocation of resources.

As asserted by Hollifield (2005 p. 1283) "If we do not have the capacity to prevent war, we have a collective responsibility to better understand and treat its psychiatric, medical, and social consequences." Violence of any kind against any group cannot be tolerated in any civilized society. Importantly, evaluating the efficacy of interventions aimed at preventing and addressing confict-related sexual violence and all forms of violence againdst women and men is essential to address root causes and to identify best practices to guide future efforts to create a safer world for all.

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Author bio

Jenna Wettstein is pursuing a masters' degree in the Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College, and is a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she has considerable experience in researching and working with both perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. She is committed to creating security for women and girls worldwide and providing an avenue for perpetrators to rehabilitate.

Special section: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls: Introduction and overview of reports on events during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 2024 featuring the West African nation of Sierra Leone

Emma Gaskins and Judy Kuriansky

"Promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women"

This is the mandate of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), an annual two-week conference on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. As usual, the 2024 session during March 11-22 brought together representatives from governments, UN entities, and civil society organizations, experts and activists from across the world to network and to agree on actions and investments that can advance gender equality. Thousands of women and men attended roundtables, interactive dialogues and many "side events" sponsored by governments and civil society organizations on a wide range of topics related to promoting, monitoring, and reviewing progress and challenges.

CSW is hosted by UN Women, the United Nations agency charged with overseeing these rights and protections. These are enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development which calls for "gender equality" and "the empowerment of women and girls" (UN WOMEN, n.d.).



This special section of the APAW journal presents reports of the CSW side events at UN headquarters co-sponsored by the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and many other organizations, for which the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations was the main sponsor.

The articles in this special section start with a report of the special event featuring the First Lady of Sierra Leone held significantly on International Women's Day celebrated annually on March 8. The relationship between Sierra Leone and IAAP is bridged by Dr. Judy Kuriansky who has long served as IAAP's representative to the United Nations to both the Economic and Social Council and also the Department of Global Communications and who is also Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, as well as Policy Advisor to Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United States in Washington DC.

The IAAP team of representatives at the UN besides Kuriansky are Dr. Walter Reichman and Russell Daisey. Two youth representatives are graduate student Theo Ntwari and Emma Gaskins, author of this report and manager of the logistics team supporting these events.

This year, IAAP immediate past President Dr. Christine Roland-Levy came from France to attend the conference and current President Lori Foster headquartered in New York also attended the meeting.

Kuriansky co-organized the events with many of her students from her Teachers College Columbia

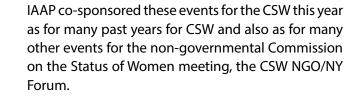
University (TC) class on *"Psychology and the United Nations"* and Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab who are also members of the IAAP Division of Students and Early Career Psychologists. She hosted the First Lady also gave concluding remarks on several panels.



IAAP past President Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy; students: Emma Gaskins, Montserrat Conzalez-Alonso, Subina Khaneji; Professor Judy Kuriansky; students: Yilin Peng, Dahlia Alwari, Jinyiantue Huang



(left to right): Student events team Emma Gaskins and Zeever Baqar with Dr. Judy Kuriansky



The five side events that Dr. Kuriansky and students organized alongside the Republic of Sierra Leone addressed the following pressing issues affecting women internationally. These highlighted not only the contributions that can be made by one small country in Africa but what can serve as a model for other countries.

They were:

"Bridging Gender Disparities and Combating Human Trafficking Through Policy Development and Social Protection Interventions." Trafficking and exploitation of women and girls is a global crisis. This panel presented Sierra Leone's successful efforts to combat trafficking and exploitation of women; shared lessons learned; highlighted collaborative efforts with different institutions with case studies and initiatives; proposed future strategies; and advocated for support from policymakers, funding agencies,



(left to right): Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Ireland to the United Nations; IAAP past President Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy; Professor Judy Kuriaansky; His Excellency Amara Sheikh Mohammed Sowa, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

and additional stakeholders to implement societal safeguarding systems (Wettstein et al., 2024).

"Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women," Women worldwide are marginalized and disproportionately subject to poverty. The Government of Sierra Leone and partners, including UN Women and CARE International, have committed to promote women's economic empowerment and stimulate dialogue on best practices to increase access to finance and scale up interventions. For example, the Bank of Sierra Leone launched a four-year plan to expand women's access to and use of specialized financial products and services and education (Peng et al., 2024a).

"Sierra Leone's Experience in Rolling Out Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems," Genderbased violence (GBV) continues to be prevalent worldwide, but technological solutions are providing hope. Sierra Leone has made combating GBV a priority and is a pioneer in implementing the new Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems (GBVIMS+) which is the online, cloudhosted software application for GBV information and case management deployed in19 humanitarian contexts globally serving over 80 user organizations. The rollout in Sierra Leone marks the first-ever deployment of the GBVIMS+ by a government. This panel is in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA (Hwang et al., 2024).

"Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone." In partnership with the Government of Ireland, Irish Aid, Trocaire, UN Women and the 50/50 Group, this panel shared gains for women made after the passage of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone as well as challenges both Sierra Leone and Ireland face in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and highlight the way forward (peng et al., 2024b).

"Mainstreaming Gender in the Big Five Game Changers in Sierra Leone." In partnership with the Government of Ireland, Irish Aid, UN Women, and the Women's Forum, this panel shared about mainstreaming gender through all plans, policies and laws in Sierra Leone through the government agenda called the "Big Five Game Changers" and presented the country's progress towards meeting the UN Agenda goals for women when most governments are sadly lagging behind (Simchuck et al., 2024).



Speakers, attendees and logistics team

As demonstrated in all these events, Sierra Leone had much to offer to the global discourse on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls specifically relevant to problems plaguing not only the country but other nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world. Sierra Leone and co-sponsors emphasized the importance of gender-based violence preventative policies and virtual systems and strategies to combat feminized poverty, trafficking and all forms of abuse. Landmark achievements from the country's revolutionary Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act were showcased, in its intersection with increased access to education for girls and improvements in healthcare.

Partners in the events represented government and civil society, including the Government of Ireland and Irish Aid; UN agencies (UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF); the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab at Teachers College, international NGOs that have worked with the First Lady's projects (the International Association of Applied Psychology, Give Them a Hand Foundation, United African Congress);

and other national and international organizations (Plan International, United Through Sport).

At the special event held on March 8, International Women's Day, welcoming the First Lady of Sierra Leone to Teachers College, Columbia University, Her Excellency Fatima Maada Bio spoke about her initiatives to empower women and girls, especially her *"Hands Off Our Girls"* campaign to end all forms of violence against women and girls (Huang, 2024; Teachers College Newsroom, 2024). The First Lady's commitment to abolish early marriage is also personal: she is herself a survivor of early marriage from which she escaped.

It was an honor to host the First Lady given her accomplishments as a champion of gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women and girls, evident in her campaign "Hands Off Our Girls" and successful efforts in Sierra Leone to end all forms of violence against women and girls assured in the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act and enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal #5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (SDG5). Notably, she has also spearheaded two historic actions on the global stage: the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence and the World Day establishing a Zero Tolerance Policy Against Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence. Perpetrators of sexual violence in Sierra Leone now face harsh punishment including life imprisonment.





Other IAAP co-sponsored events during CSW and other major UN conferences

Other IAAP co-sponsored CSW events with the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN were held at this year's CSW. These included about "Empowering Women and Girls" at Turkiye House on March 13, which is presented annually at the invitation of NEYAD (Nil Education and Aid Association) an educational NGO in Turkiye. Three other annual cosponsored events held at Un headquarters were: the World Interfaith Harmony Week on 27 February; the "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development" on May 21; and for the Conference of States Parties to the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COSP), held on a stage outdoors on the UN plaza on June 12 with remarks by UN Ambassadors and others, and performances by persons with disabilities singing, dancing nad in a fashion show (UN WebTV, 2024).

In all, the team of Kuriansky and her students were honored to join the Government and the Mission of Sierra Leone as well as CSW participants from across the globe in calling for the establishment of genderbased economic and social policies and innovative programs. The collaborations among all the partners, speakers, co-sponsors and attendees showed a unified commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment on a global scale. The advocacy and initiatives presented emphasize the importance of collective action in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by women and girls worldwide but hope for the future.

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Author Bios

Emma Gaskins, M.A., graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University Masters Program in Developmental Psychology with a background in educational and developmental psychology research. Previously, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina, earning a B.A. in psychology and a minor in English. Currently, she serves as the Co-Manager of Teachers College, Columbia University's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, actively contributing to advocacy initiatives for the advancement of youth mental health and well-being. These initiatives involve collaboration with ambassadors and delegates from United Nations mission offices, emphasizing the practical application of psychology in addressing alobal challenges. Her academic and professional interests seek to advance the development of youth, through educational settings, psychosocial interventions, or youth development programs. Her studies and research have focused on facilitating holistic, social-emotional approaches to learning and implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs, addressing multifaceted challenges faced by youth globally. Her goals are to implement programming which empowers young people to reach their full potential by encouraging positive growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations.". She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His

Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

"Hands Off Our Girls" for gender equality and empowerment: International Women's Day special event with the First Lady of Sierra Leone

Jintianyue Huang and Judy Kuriansky

Introduction

While efforts are being made to protect women and girls around the world, much more needs to be accomplished. Each year, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) convenes a two-week long session to assess progress made with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls that has long been the topic of legislative and community actions and which since 2015 has been enshrined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal #5. The CSW conference kicks off with a celebration of International Women's Day annually on March 8, for which a special event was held this year at Teachers College Columbia University as a special class of the course on "Psychology and the United Nations" taught by Professor Judy Kuriansky, welcoming the First Lady of Sierra Leone Her Excellency Fatima Maada Bio to present about her trailblazing work on behalf of women and girls. This report covers that event.

Honoring the First Lady was especially significant as she is a distinctive champion of the rights of women and girls in all her projects in the country and at the United Nations where she spearheaded groundbreaking resolutions to ensure access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, and zero tolerance for child sexual abuse. Notably, March is also Women's History Month and the First Lady has made historical strides in women's rights.

The event was organized by Professor Judy Kuriansky with a team of students in her course and in her Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab. Co-sponsors were the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, the Office of the First Lady, the George Clement Bond Center for African Education at Teachers College, and several NGOs which have collaborated with the First Lady's projects, including the International Association of Applied Psychology which Dr. Kuriansky represents at the UN, the United African Congress and the Give Them A Hand Foundation.

The event was in four parts: a private meeting with the First Lady and a group of students particularly interested in the issues of gender equality and working with her on next steps in her initiative; a meeting with the school Provost; an elegant invited luncheon reception; and the official event program with speeches by the First Lady and invited others, open to wider attendance. These are reported below, as well as background of the issues.

Posters of the event



(credit: Yilin Peng)



(credit: Subina Khaneja)



TA Melissa Clark; student team member Emily McGill; Professor Judy Kuriansky; First Lady Fatima Maada Bio; student team members Niklas Nyblom, Josefina Streeter, Dilara Ozbutun



Speakers, organizers and students [left to right: Mohammed Kosia of the Sierra Leone Embassy to the United States; Bethann Carbone; students (Zeever Baqar, Yilin Peng, Meizhu Liu,]imin Kim, Dahlia Alrawi); Roslynn Finda Senesi of the Sierra Leone Mission to the United Nations; student Josefina Streeter; Russell Daisey; student Subina Kaneja

Background

Abuses and violence against women and girls has been a persistent problem throughout the ages. While advances have been made in recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic escalated such incidents to alarming rates. UN Women and Women Count (2021) report that 1 in 2 women have experienced violence or know a woman who has, since the pandemic.

Also, in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, government member states of the United Nations had notably committed to achieve strides in gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, by the midpoint year, achievement of this goal and others of the 17 goals in the Agenda, is sadly lagging, with a report that "a mere 15.4 percent of Goal 5 indicators with data are 'on track', 61.5 percent are at a moderate distance and 23.1 percent are far or very far off track from 2030 targets" (United Nations, 2023).

Efforts by the United Nations to insure the safety of women has a long history. Notably, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security adopted in the year 2000 (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, n.d.) established rape as a weapon of war and affirmed the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace and security negotiations and planning. The UN agency of the

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported making significant progress in gender equality in the first year of their new Gender Action Plan 2022-25 (2022, p.3) and The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has also announced making Women, Peace, and Security as a priority in their agenda (2023).

Most importantly, the targets of Goal 5 of the UN Agenda intersect with the First Lady's projects which she addressed in her presentation. These proscribe all forms of violence and abuse, including from trafficking, sexual violence and early marriage.

Stages of the March 8 event Stage 1: Invited meeting with the students

In the first stage of the event, a 20-minute informal meeting was held between the First Lady and select students from Professor Kuriansky's class "*Psychology at the UN*" who were all working with Dr. Kuriansky on the issue of the rights of women and girls and the projects of the First Lady.

The First Lady described the importance and urgency of gender equality. Despite notable efforts, she said that gender-based violence persists in communities and also in conflict and war situations. "We (women) don't create problems, but any time there is instability or war in the world, sex is used to demean, suppress and abuse women," she said. "So we women need to fight back and make sure we are not bullets."

She expressed her hope in bringing more women, and men, into the long and crucial journey of achieving gender equality and women's rights.



The First Lady meeting with select students

Stage 2: In the next stage, the First Lady met with the Provost of the University (Teachers College Newsroom, 2024). The discussion addressed how the work of the First Lady intersects with the interests of many students regarding advancing the rights of women as well as pedagogical possibilities in education of African girls.



Pictured (left to right): His Excellency Sidique Wai, Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the United States; Adjunct Professor Judy Kuriansky;Her Excellency Dr. Fatima Maada Bio; KerryAnn O'Meara, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost and Dean of the College (center); Matt Blanchard, Director or TC's MA in Clinical Psychology program; student Zeever Baqar; and His Excellency Michael Imran Kanu, Ambassador of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. (Photo: TC Archives)

Stage 3: Lunch Reception

A lunch reception was then held in a private dining room for high-level guests, including from the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States, TC faculty, and select students. Dr. Kuriansky gave welcoming remarks, acknowledging the First Lady's extensive contributions to the rights of women and girls, her *"Hands Off Our Girls'* initiative and the historic resolutions adopted by the United Nations championed by the First Lady for access to justice for survivors of sexual violence and for zero tolerance for children sexual abuse.

"As we celebrate this day – International women's Day – and this month – Women's History Month – we are honored to celebrate today a woman, First Lady Fatima Maada Bio, who has indeed made history for her country and the world," she said.



Dr. Kuriansky introduced honored guests, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, Dr. Michael Imran Kanu and the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United States, H.E Sidique AbouBakarr Wai, saying, "Sierra Leone is fortunate to have these two brilliant ambassadors who carry forward the entire agenda of women's rights as well as show the importance of Sierra Leone on the global stage."



(left to right) Professor Judy Kuriansky, H.E. Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai and H.E. Michael Imran Kanu



(Left to right): Roselynn Finda Senesi and Mohammed Massaquoi, Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; Mohammed Kosia, embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States; Professor Judy Kuriansky; students Emily McGill, Zeever Baqar

Stage 4: event with special address by the First Lady

The guests were then escorted to the convening in a large hall in the college, where attendees had been served lunch. At the head table were seated The First Lady, His Excellency Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai, Chief of Mission of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United States, His Excellency Michael Imran Kanu, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the

United Nations, Dr. Kuriansky and Dr. Matt Blanchard, Director of TC's Clinical Psychology Department. They were later joined by the Deputy Ambassador of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN, H.E. Amara Sheikh Mohammed Sowa.

Dr.Kurianskywelcomed everyone and acknowledged the significance of this event and the honor of the First Lady in coming to this event to make a special address on International Women's Day during this year's United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and Women's History Month.

Coincident with these markers, she pointed out that the First Lady has made history in impressive national and global strides in promoting women's rights and safety, efforts which perfectly coincide with the interests of many students in her *"Psychology at the United Nations"* class, whom she acknowledged. Significantly, the First Lady spearheaded two historic actions on the global stage: the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence and the World Day establishing a Zero Tolerance Policy Against Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence. Importantly, perpetrators now face much stiffer punishment. She also recognized the specialness of the event with the Ambassadors present.

The event's theme was announced as centering on the First Lady's *"Hands off Our Girls"* campaign which advocates for access to justice and support for survivors of sexual violence, as well as to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse (Office of the First lady, 2023). Practical steps have been made including banning early marriage and free sanitary pads for girls. The First Lady's efforts "are not something that you read in a book, it's something that comes from her heart." Kuriansky noted feeling honored to present this program given her history supporting the First Lady's initiatives as well as her long-term involvement providing psychosocial support in the country during many crises, and advocating about gender issues in her years-long advocacy at the United Nations, including ensuring mental health and wellbeing was in the Agenda.

In alignment with the persistent message of the UN Agency UN Women and at the CSW conference, she noted that "Men need to support women in all these efforts to achieve gender equality," Importantly, the President of Sierra Leone Dr. Julius Maada Bio, the First Lady's husband, is a staunch champion of the rights of women and girls.

Education is key to achieving women's rights, she said. Consistent with this, Dr. Kuriansky highlighted the First Lady's involvement in education initiatives in her country and the Education Plus initiative of UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women. which provides comprehensive education and empowerment programs to prevent HIV/AIDS in Africa.



Dr. Judy Kuriansky introducing the special event



Next, Dr. Matt Blanchard, Director of the Masters degree Clinical Psychology program at TC spoke, introducing the department of Clinical Psychology and its commitment to global partnership in advancing women's rights.

Dr. Blanchard underscored the program's commitment to promoting human rights, particularly those of women and girls, and its dedication to global engagement and partnerships in advancing mental health and well-being worldwide. He emphasized the significance of International Women's Day, noting that the TC program has 85% of female students, with dedication to improving human development and rights. "Each year, we graduate around 200 young psychologists committed to making a difference," he said. He highlighted the program's global nature, with students from diverse backgrounds, some of whom return back to their countries to apply their knowledge and help make the world a better place.

He also acknowledged the contributions of Dr. Kuriansky's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab in connecting students to the activities of the United Nations. In closing, he expressed gratitude for the presence of the First Lady in recognition of her significant legacy in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.



Dr. Matt Blanchard, speaking, with Dr. Judy Kuriansky



At head table: Ambassador Michel Imran Knau, Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai and First Lady Fatima Maada Bio saluting to the National Anthems

Russell Daisey presenting "Honour Our Girls" anthem

Next, international musician Russell Daisey performed an original anthem as an homage to the First Lady's *"Hands Off our Girls"* initiative, with lyrics by Dr. Kuriansky and himself. The accompanying video showed inspiring scenes coordinated with the words about honoring girls, capitulating with a message that girls can achieve anything with a good education.

Examples of the lyrics are: Honor our girls, They're the love of our life, the future of our country, the hope for our world. Keep from harm, Protect them from hate. Hands off our girls, There's no time to wait. Such beautiful souls as they reach for their goals... a

nurse or a preacher, designer or teacher or President of our nation...Anything is possible, with a good education!

Empower our girls, They're the love of our life, the future of our family, center of our community, soul of our society, core of our country... the hope for our world.



Russell Daisey (left) performing original anthem "Hands Off Our Girls"(seated, left to right): Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu, Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai, First Lady Fatima Maada Bio

Mohamed Kosia: Dr. Fatima Maada Bio's Impact on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Next to speak was Mr. Mohamed Kosia, Trade and Investment Liaison Officer at the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States, who provided insight into the journey of the First Lady in advancing the right of women and girls, characterizing it as both 'historic" and "transformational" and highlighting her unwavering resolve to effect positive change on gender equality marked.

"In her historic and transformational journey in life, it is a journey of hope and resolve to make a difference for good," he said.

Throughout her experiences, he described, the First Lady has exhibited "resilience and commitment to make a meaningful impact on society and bring hope and equality to all women." Well familiar with her keystone "Hands Off Our Girls" project from being influential in its initiation, he added, "Her legacy on advancing gender equality, women's empowerment, and indeed, in ending sexual exploitation and abuse, provides the means for recognizing the dignity and healing of abused children."

He then introduced a 25-minute video showing the First Lady's journey in her fight for gender equality.



(left to right) Dr. Matt Blanchard (seated) Dr. Judy Kurainsky and Mohamed Kosia

Dr. Fatima Maada Bio: Importance, commitment, inspiration, and challenge in gender equality

Following the video, the First Lady took to the podium. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to engage meaningfully with this august assemblage on the special occasion of International Women's Day. In explaining her commitment to inspire inclusion and empowerment for women and girls in Sierra Leone and worldwide, she highlighted the challenges they face, including conflict, political instability, and gender disparities, exacerbated by factors such as child marriage and sexual violence. Noting the complacency of some communities, religious and traditional leaders, and politicians in perpetuating these injustices, she called on them instead to join in the efforts to end these injustices.

Entrenched norms must be challenged, she said, as they restrict women's freedom and perpetuate gender inequality and limit girls to only being in the kitchen and preparing to be a mother instead of being able to take advantage of wider opportunities.

Her work has been dedicated to transforming societal attitudes and policies to value and empower girls and women, as well as combatting the high rates of infant and maternal mortality rooted in the devaluation of women.

The First Lady then singled out the serious problem for women of fistula, a medical condition resulting from inadequate maternal healthcare and procedures that leads many women in Sierra Leone and worldwide to endure prolonged labor resulting in stillbirth and ruptured reproductive organs.

Early marriage was another topic of special emphasis, especially given her personal experience being subjected to this as a young girl, though fortunately escaping. Early marriage is linked to

the spread of HIV/AIDS, she said, since child brides are unable to get HIV testing before intercourse. Tragically, HIV infection gets transmitted from mother to child and then perpetuated through generations.

Gender equality, healthcare and education are all linked, she explained.

Legislative reform is urgently needed, she said. In Sierra Leone, the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 is being reviewed. Also, the Gender Equality and Empowerment Act is a significant advance (Government Printing Office, Sierra Leone, 2022). Her *"Hands Off of Our Girls"* campaign addresses all these issues.

Significantly, women need a seat at the table in all areas, including politics, she emphaszied. The June 2023 election in the country resulted in an impressive number of women in elective positions in Parliament and local councils, and appointments as Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other senior government positions as a result of the President's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

She called for declaring "a state of emergency" to addressentrenchedsocietalnormsdevaluingwomen

and emphasized the campaign's aggressiveness to ensure widespread understanding and action.



First Lady Fatima Maada Bio speaking

Partnerships play a crucial role, whereby community involvement and support is essential. In this regard, the First Lady highlighted collaboration with the military and police, as well as religious leaders, to effectively enforce the *Hands Off Our Girls* campaign message. Communities must take ownership of the initiative, she said.

Religious leaders also need to be engaged, she said, by condemning practices like early marriage and promoting education.

Laws also must be passed and enforced, which empower women when they know there is a new law in place that assures them that, "You cannot rape a child. if you do, you're going to vanish from here." The judicial system plays an essential role, with specialized courts for victims and increased penalties for perpetrators as tangible outcomes of governmental involvement.

Of note, these legal advances are happening in Sierra Leone, and the First Lady herself has spearheaded the two aforementioned United Nations Resolutions to increase access to justice for survivors of sexual

violence and zero tolerance for abuse of children (United Nations, 2022).

Through her speech, the First Lady demonstrated a commitment to collaborative action and systemic change in the fight for gender equality and the protection of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

Education, she emphasized, plays a critical role in solving gender inequality given that, as she said, "There is nothing that's a more powerful equalizer than education." In fact, Sierra Leone offers free quality education to children, with positive outcomes of increased school enrollment and improved access to justice.

Education is transformative, she said, yet girls face enormous challenges in continuing their education, which includes menstruation-related absences from school. As a result, her initiatives provide free sanitary pads to girls so they can continue attending school. Other practical steps to make education available to girls include providing free lunch and transportation.

Sharing her own experiences in how to impact global change, the First Lady mentioned all the hard work and concrete action that is necessary. "You can't just come to the United Nations and say, 'I wanted this because I am the First Lady of Sierra Leone," she said. "You have to work hard and engage all groups in a common effort. And, that effort has to be ongoing, with all advocates and partners asserting, "I am a voice that refuses to be silenced."

Men and boys also have to be engaged and involved. She urged men to view women as allies, and to recognize the value that women can bring to the table. "Don't see us as strangers, see us as your allies, work with us" she said, adding, "As long as you give us the space, we're willing to do all the work."

Educators also play an important role in promoting peace and morality. "You don't only want to empower them with enlightenment, but you also want to empower them to know the morality that it is their responsibility to save people."

Gender-based violence is a global concern, she said, calling for all allies to join her in combating it.

In conclusion, the First Lady emphasized the urgency of the fight for gender equality, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak at TC, and appreciated the support in celebrating International Women's Day.







First Lady Fatima Maada Bio with Dr. Judy Kuriansky

Q and A period

A spirited question and answer period followed with students asking pertinent questions of the First Lady about the issues and her project.



Students asking the First Lady questions

Press

Given her significant accomplishments regarding women's rights and the timeliness of Women's History Month and International Women's Day, and her special address at Teachers College Columbia University, the latter was covered by the college press (Teachers College Newsroom, 2024) and also the First Lady was interviewed on these topics by mass media press outlets. Notably, these included on the TV show Newsmax's Saturday Report hosted by the award-winning reporter Rita Cosby, and a feature in Devex, the noted media platform for th global development community, about child marriage as a "legalized form of rape" (Gawel, 2024).



First Lady Fatima Maada Bio interviewed by host Rita Coby on Newsmax TV show

Subsequent events at the United Nations

This special event was followed by five events held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City during the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference that elaborated on issues discussed by the First Lady. The event topics covered: "Bridging Gender Disparities and Combating Trafficking and Exploitation of Women";"Mainstreaming Gender in the Big Five Game Changers in Sierra Leone"; "Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women"; "Beyond the Gender Equality and Empowerment Act of Sierra Leone" and "Sierra Leone's Experience in Rolling Out Innovative Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems" as the first-ever government to do so; and (Delaney et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2024; 2024; Peng et al., 2024a, 2024b; Wettstein et al., 2024).

In all, the events showcased how a small country like Sierra Leone can make a big difference in achieving the SDG5 goal of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, and taking bold and innovative steps to create positive change not only for women and girls but for the whole of society.

Personal Reflections of the first author, Jintianyue Huang

Any kind of civil rights movement is going to be a long journey, with thousands of people dedicating their lives to it, hoping for, although never guaranteed, positive change. Such a journey is especially hard when other factors, such as toxic traditions and economic hardships, are involved. I was exceptionally impressed with the speech by the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Dr. Fatima Maada Bio, in her commitment to create a peaceful, equal, and happy place for all women and girls, not only in her country of Sierra Leone but for the whole world. By combining her personal experience, dedication and passion, and profound knowledge and understanding of the root causes of gender inequality, the First Lady is a shing role model of how to bring about real changes that are holistic in society and that cover real-life problems that women and girls face in Sierra Leone, ranging from tackling "smaller" problems, such as providing free sanitary

pads, to bigger problems such as providing free quality education. I especially appreciate her downto-the-earth attitude in the midst of her exceptional commitment and effectiveness in making actual changes that provide immediate benefits to people. As a First lady of a country, Dr. Fatima Maada Bio doesn't use her title and position to take things for granted but acknowledges the importance of taking concrete actions and working hard, exemplified in what she said, that, "You can't come to the United Nations and say, I wanted this because I am the First Lady of Sierra Leone" instead you have to do the hard work. Her extensive work at the grassroots level while being a strong woman and a dynamic powerful person makes her able to earn trust from her people, motivate allies to support her, and truly make an enormous difference in her country and the world.

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Jintianyue (Chris) Huang is a masters degree student in the Philosophy and Education program at Teachers College, Columbia University, ho graduated with a

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Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations.". She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely

about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives."

Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women: Advances in the Republic of Sierra Leone

Yilin Peng, Charles Vandi, Judy Kuriansky, Emma Gaskins, Gordon Tapper and Roselynn Finda Senesi

Introduction

Women throughout the world have fewer rights to become entrepreneurs, employers or employees than men. In Sierra Leone, addressing feminized poverty through financial inclusion for women has emerged as a critical imperative. With an understanding that poverty disproportionately affects women, initiatives aimed at bolstering financial inclusion have gained prominence.

Approximately 51% of Sierra Leone's population, as indicated by the 2021 Mid-term Census, is comprised of women, who possess considerable potential to actively participate in the country's development (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2021). However, similar to many nations, women in Sierra Leone are regrettably more likely to experience financial marginalization, placing them at greater risk of poverty (Koroma, 2014).

Globally, 74% of women are considered financially included. However, in Sierra Leone, the total financial inclusion rate is only 29%, and for women, it is even lower at 25%, according to the 2021 edition of the Global Findex report. Sierra Leone's strides in financial inclusion, alongside the Bank of Sierra Leone's collaboration with both major and minor banks, have ushered in an era of inclusivity. Under the apt and innovative leadership of His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio, the government's proactive stance on promoting gender equality and women's rights, coupled with an open-door regulatory approach, has catalyzed tangible progress and empowered women, reflecting the country's vision for social protection and female empowerment. Progress includes: The launch of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) 2022-2026 by the Bank of Sierra Leone (BSL), a four-year plan specifically targeting women, youth, rural populations and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Bank of Sierra Leone, 2022). The objectives are to: promote client-centered financial products and services towards underserved populations such as women; develop innovative technology solutions to expand access to and use of digital financial products and services; and ensure that women and all Sierra Leoneans have access to financial education opportunities while ensuring their safety and protection.

In 2022, the government passed into law the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill and Part III of the GEWE Act is on "Women's Empowerment" (Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, n.d.). Section 7(1) states that "women shall have equal access and rights to credit and financial services, transactions and products, and Section 7(2) states that "a government financial institution, including the Bank of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Finance shall prescribe procedures and processes for improving access to finance for women".

In 2020, the government allocated US\$100,000 to establish the Women's Empowerment Fund to support female entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was directed by a Cabinet memorandum to transfer these funds to CARE International Sierra Leone and partner with UN Women to contribute a matching fund to the Women's Empowerment Fund.

On February 12, 2021, President Bio officially launched the Government of Sierra Leone Microfinance Program (MUNAFA FUND) to promote and develop small and micro enterprises (SMEs) in the country, widely considered the engine of economic growth

and estimated to contribute about 95% to the GDP of developed and developing countries, and to account for about 87% of jobs in Sierra Leone, particularly in the agriculture and tourism sectors. An estimated 4,038 women benefited from the fund, compared with 1,290 men. (State House Media and Communications Unit, 2021).

The progress made addresses objectives outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by contributing to SDG 5 which calls for focusing on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as to SDG 8 which emphasizes decent work and economic growth.

Event Overview

To promote sharing information and experiences about the policies, programs and initiatives undertaken by Sierra Leone to foster women's financial empowerment, Sierra Leone hosted an event during the 68th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2024 entitled "Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women: Advances in the Republic of Sierra Leone".

The goals were to: emphasize the importance of policy and laws in ensuring financial security and advancement of women; show how efforts in Sierra Leone are reshaping the economic landscape, empowering women, and fostering sustainable development; stimulate dialogue on best practices that increase access to finance for women; mobilize support in scaling up interventions; and encourage partnerships.

This event was held in person at United Nations Headquarters in New York City in Conference Room C on March 20, 2024, for an hour and fifteen minutes, from 10:00 am-11:15am (EST/New York Time).

The event was one of an impressive number of five events sponsored by the Government of Sierra Leone during CSW68, that highlighted the advances the Sierra Leone government and their partners are making in achieving SDG5.

The main sponsor was the Government of Sierra Leone, with co-sponsorship of the World Bank, UN Women, Christian Aid, Susue's Women's Finance, International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), Give Them A Hand Foundation, and Columbia University Teachers College Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab.



Co-sponsors of the event



Panelists CSW 2024 Sierra Leone event on Feminized Poverty

The moderator was Ms. Anushe Khan, Senior Operations Officer of the Financial Inclusion and Banking Financial Institutions Group of the International Financial Corporation (IFC). Headquartered in Washington D.C., IFC is an international financial institution that offers investment, advisory, and asset-management services to encourage private-sector development in less developed countries.



Moderator Ms. Anushe Khan

"Women across the world have fewer rights and opportunities to open their own businesses to access jobs and to have their economic independence compared to men," Khan said.

She introduced that the event would examine the experiences in addressing poverty through financial inclusion for women and the actions that the Sierra Leone government has taken to support women in their quest for economic independence and increased participation in the economy.

Opening remarks

Opening remarks were made by Hon. Dr. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone. Minister Mahoi has extensive skills and expertise advocating for human rights, promoting gender equality, and providing strategic advice on gender-related issues, including gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Previously, she was the National Network Coordinator of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone where she applied her vast knowledge of conflict resolution and social cohesion, and also worked as consultant for the World Bank in Sierra Leone and for UN agencies, including UNICEF, FAO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA and UNWOMEN.

"The economic empowerment of women must go together with the country's economic growth and development," Minister Mahoi said. "This is why the Sierra Leone government was deliberate in developing the Medium-Term National Development Plan which is looking at human capital development," she added, emphasizing the importance of women's empowerment in Sierra Leone.

Minister Mahoi explained that her Ministry is responsible for the advancement and development of women in Sierra Leone and collaborates with partners to develop policy about gender equality and women's empowerment.



Opening speaker Minster Isata Mahoi

The resulting policies, she explained, "serve as a blueprint on which the strategies and initiatives for combating gender-based discrimination, gender inequalities and women's economic empowerment are addressed, provide a road map for achieving equal treatment for men and women in Sierra Leone, and position women and men to contribute equally to Sierra Leone's development agenda."

To ensure women's equal rights and economic empowerment, the Sierra Leone government enacted the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act in 2022.

"The enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act has positioned a lot of women today in leadership positions," she said, elaborating that "Elected positions have also increased and women have been appointed in other leadership positions."

"We want to see a situation where women will no longer beg for a position in Sierra Leone but rather we will see ourselves as equal partners in development," she continued. "Women will be there to make decisions on their own and will be able to advocate for their rights without being pressured."

To ensure economic empowerment of Sierra Leone women, in a major groundbreaking move in January 2022, the World Bank with the Bank of Sierra Leone launched the new National Strategy for Financial Inclusion specifically targeting women as well as young people, rural populations and medium, small and micro enterprises.

"The strategy aligns with the Medium-Term National Development Plan, which takes a people- centered long-term development thinking approach to reduce poverty and aspiring economic growth," she explained. In particular, it aligns with clusters 2, 3, 5 and 6 of the Plan which collectively propose a focus on advancing inclusion of rural communities and women and young people entrepreneurs, giving them opportunities to raise themselves out of poverty and enhance their Economic Security.

Additionally, she elaborated the significance that President Bio officially launched the Government of

Sierra Leone microcredit scheme "Munafa", a fund to develop small and micro- enterprises in the country.

"This enables a business environment and also enhances the development of women and also increases their access to finance," Minister Mahoi explained.

"It is important to note a gender difference," Minister Mahoi said, given estimates that over three times as many women as men have benefited from the funds.

Video

Following Minister Mahoi's opening statement, a short video was shown about financial inclusion for women in Sierra Leone. The film describes the journey of women who have transitioned from financial exclusion to independence and making economic contributions to the country. It focuses specifically on the transformative impact of women gaining access to bank accounts, so they can start supporting and building their own businesses, and how financial inclusion has opened doors to opportunities and economic independence for women.



Film about financial inclusion in Sierra Leone

Panel Round 1: Questions addressed to individual panelists

After the film showing, the moderator Ms. Khan asked individual questions to the panelists.

The first question was posed to Mr. Charles Vandi, Director of Gender Affairs of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone, about the enacting of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act of 2022.

Q: "Could you tell us briefly about a few of the provisions that can help with gender equality? Also, what were some of the challenges that you faced in drafting and enacting the law?"

A: Mr. Vandi started his answer by emphasizing that there can be no true political and social empowerment without an economic environment for financial advancement for women.

Then, he introduced how Sierra Leone provides a thriving economic environment for women. He elaborated that the government of Sierra Leone made 13 policy action areas. One of those policy action areas deals with women's economic empowerment, which is the key driver to the overall empowerment of women. Then, the gender policy of 2020 informed gender equality, and subsequently, the government published the Gender Equality and

Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act of 2022 which when enacted into law enshrined improvements to women's access to finance, employment opportunities, and equal pay, as well as maternity leave and-critically-political representation establishing a 30% quota for women's participation in government.

"The World Bank commended the government of Sierra Leone for being among six countries that have done well in progressive laws for women empowerment," he said.

"So, you begin to see, we have access to finance for women and the law states that the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Sierra Leone should take further measures to ensure that women's financial inclusion is actually enhanced."

In answer to the question about challenges, Mr. Vandi countered that by noting that enacting the GEWE bill took a relatively short time - 13 months – to pass in Parliament. The outcome is important and impressive in that with its promotion, he said, women are increasingly represented in leadership positions and have a stronger voice in Sierra Leone.



Panelist Mr. Charles Vandi

The strategic trajectory of the government and of the Ministry of Gender and Youth Affairs, he explained, is not just to increase the number of women in leadership, but also to ensure that women contribute to the economic development of the country.

The GEWE law is a very progressive law, and actually provides political empowerment, social empowerment and economic empowerment for women and therefore for all society. While it empowers women, he explained, the outcome is significant across genders in that "When women are empowered, men are the greatest beneficiaries."

As a result of the empowerment of women, he emphasized, there is "improvement in the lives and livelihood for all Sierra Leoneans."

Major steps and progress have been made, but the government is still working to make further progress for women's empowerment, he said.

In conclusion, he reiterated that "When women are empowered, men benefit, families benefit, society benefits."

The moderator praised this point. Then, she addressed the next question to H.E Ambassador Ernest Mbaima Ndomahina, Commissioner of the National Commission for Social Action in Sierra Leone.

Q: "Commissioner Ndomhina, building on Dr. Mahoi's response, could you please tell us about how the empowerment act and the financial inclusion strategy help to support the National Commission's work in financial inclusion?"

A: Commissioner Ndomhina began by introducing Sierra Leone's achievements in women's economic empowerment.

"I'm honored to be part of this noble meeting, because I believe in women's empowerment," he said, adding that "As a Commission, we have done quite well so far."

He explained that the economic empowerment of women in Sierra Leone has received support and cooperation from many entities including the World

Bank, UNICEF, the KFW development bank, and the Islamic Bank.



Panelist Ambassador Ernest Mbaima Ndomahina

Data supports the importance of women in Sierra Leone and broad benefits that have been achieved.

"In the past five years, 92% of women, including 24% of persons with disability have benefited from cash transfers that enable them to access basic services like health (62%) and education (44%) and for our children as a whole," he cited.

Next, the moderator addressed a question to panelist Ms. Abibatu Turay, Head of the Consumer Protection Section within the Banking Supervision Department at the Bank of Sierra Leone for the National Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Q: "It's a great achievement for the Bank of Sierra Leone to launch The National Financial Inclusion Strategy and not many countries have done so. Let me turn to Ms. Turay now and ask her: "If you could share how the strategy will help unlock financing for women entrepreneurs and at the same time within that inclusion strategy, could you share some of your thoughts on you know sex data reporting and collection?"



Panelist Ms. Abibatu Turay; (behind her): Russell Daisey, IAAP representative to the UN

A: Ms. Abibatu Turay described the priorities in the strategy for financial inclusion implemented by the Bank of Sierra Leone and elaborated about how these strategies play a critical role in unlocking financing for women. They are:

1)Reducing financial exclusion and access barriers.

The strategy ensures that women have access to formal financial services including bank accounts and credit, by addressing barriers such as lack of documentation, limited awareness, and cultural norms, so that the result is to ensure women entrepreneurs gain better access to finance.

2) Broadening the use of formal financial products by women.

The strategy encourages the adoption of quality and affordable financial products by women such as tailored loans. As a result, women can better manage their businesses and invest and expand their businesses.

3) Strengthening financial consumer protection and financial literacy.

The strategy emphasizes financial literacy and education for women so that they can make

informed decisions about growing, saving and investing. Consumer protection measures ensure fair treatment and prevent exploitation creating a safer financial environment for women

4) Promoting gender inclusion finance.

The strategy targets gender disparity and financial inclusion and encourages financial institutions to design products specifically designed for women's needs such as Women- Focused Credit programs. The strategy also encourages financial institutions to redesign their business strategies to incorporate specific plans that promote gender financial inclusion. Importantly, this approach is both a business opportunity as well as a public social responsibility.

The Moderator then proceeded to pose a question to Ms. Naasu Genevieve Fofanah, an entrepreneur and author as well as the CEO of Susue Women's Finance, an organization that focuses on influencing government policies on women's business and access to finance.

Q: "Your leadership in establishing Susue women's Finance in Sierra Leone is actually very inspiring. Thank you! Please tell us a little bit more about the initiative, particularly around the customized loans, the pricing interest rates, some of the customer profile, as well as the holistic financial services that you mentioned."

A: Ms. Fofanah began her answer by stressing the importance of the financial environment and government support of empowerment for women, and praising the policies implemented by the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio.

She mentioned that one of the biggest gaps in Sierra Leone, as in other countries, is women's financial inclusion and women's access to finance. This is especially true when it comes to running for office.

"Women have to have money. We can have all the women in Parliament but we'll probably not get a woman president if we don't have money, and my goal is to ensure that women in Sierra Leone have their own money."



Panelist Ms. Naasu Genevieve Fofanah

But, she said, in emphasizing financial inclusion, all women need to have access to finances. This requires education. "When we talk about women, we should not just focus on those women who are highly educated."

What really interests her, she said, is women in the informal sector who have a lot of cash stored somewhere – like possibly even under the mattress. If women bring those funds from the informal sector to the formal sector, she explained, they can capitalize their own bank. However, currently funds women have in informal sectors cannot be accounted for because women are not able to access the formal banking services.

A significant step in the right direction, she described, is the cooperation between Sierra Leone Commercial Bank and the Market Women Association of Sierra Leone made in 2020. This addressed solutions to bring in women from the informal sector by the development of a product called the Women's Bank under the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank.

"We are loaning women today," she said, having given loans to up to 150 women at an interest rate of between 5% to 9%. Impressive results show that "We have no nonperforming loans on our books."

The product lends money to women on a business basis, rather than a typical annual loan, based on the needs of Sierra Leone women and the specific circumstances of the country.

"As women -- and as women in Sierra Leone -- the only way that we can achieve what we want is by actually taking charge of our situation and not being treated as a welfare case," she said emphatically.

She then outlined impressive and exciting expectations and prospects for the future in a new and perhaps unexpected direction which presages not just financial advancement but protection of the environment. Along these lines, she introduced the concept of "solution entrepreneurs" who would accomplish these varied goals.

"In three years, we are not only going to have our own bank but we're going to name it the Women's Green Bank because we're also bringing into the mix the climate issues and environmental issues. We don't just want to be seen as people who have suffered, but we are 'solution entrepreneurs' and that's what we want to show, not just to Sierra Leone but to the world. And that's what we're doing. So, it is not just finance."

In conclusion, she declared, "We cannot leave everything in the hands of the government and so women are taking charge and that's what we will continue to do until we get there."

Next, the moderator addressed a question to the last panelist, Ms. Daniela Monikor Behr, economist in the Women, Business and Law (WBL) Project at The World Bank.

Q: "Could you give us your insight on the progress that Sierra Leone has made in the World Bank's 2024 Women Business and Law Index and what we should learn from these efforts?" A: Ms. Behr began her answer with a striking statistic, which underscored the pressing imperative for concerted action to address systemic inequalities. She cited,

"Today, across the world, 3.9 billion women – half of humanity – do not hold the same legal rights as men."

The gender gap for women in the global workforce is massive, she added, and much wider than previously thought.

"Less than 2/3 of the legal rights available to men are held by women, so women only hold 2/3 of the legal rights of men, not three quarters as previously thought."

In addition to the data showing that women's employment and economic opportunities are unequal to that of men's, she mentioned that women's safety and childcare have a crucial impact on women's livelihoods and economic opportunities at different stages of their lives. Only 40% of countries have the right mechanisms in place to make laws that protect women's rights work properly.

Ms. Behr used a metaphor to vividly describe this phenomenon.



Panelist Ms. Daniela Monikor Behr

"Having laws without implementing mechanisms is like driving a car with one foot on the gas and one on the brake. You won't move forward. So, no economy can achieve its true potential without the equal involvement of both men and women, and in fact, closing this gender gap could raise the global GDP by more than 20%."

Her remarks then focused on actions taken in Sierra Leone. Over the years, Sierra Leone has been one of the countries with the largest reform initiatives, promoting social change through legislation. When it comes to financial inclusion, she said, a legal framework that provides an enabling environment is key.

"Only 94 economies have laws in place that explicitly outlaw discrimination and access to credit and Sierra Leone is one of those, explicitly prohibiting genderbased discrimination in financial services. Also, as we've heard before, Sierra Leone has implemented its National Financial Inclusion Strategy which emphasizes women's access to financial services and this makes Sierra Leone one of the few African countries that has a governmental strategy or plan focusing specifically on women's financial inclusion."

Finally, she concluded that the results emerging from the data in the WBL 2024 report call for a comprehensive set of actions to close gender gaps.

"We can really learn from Sierra Leone as an example in that year," she said. "Creating a gender-friendly legal environment can not only create more opportunities for women, but also make societies stronger and more resilient."

[Note: WBL is a World Bank Group project that collects data on the laws and policy mechanisms that measure the enabling environment for women's economic opportunity and differences in access to economic opportunities between men and women in 190 economies. Even in high-income countries with high scores for treating women equally under the law, implementation of these laws is lacking. WBL supports that countries adopt laws that strengthen and promote: women's rights and opportunities as essential for inclusive, resilient, stronger societies; equal treatment of women under the law; more women entering and remaining in the labor force with higher wages, rising to managerial positions, and business ownership.]

Panel Round 2: Questions addressed to all panelists

The moderator Ms. Khan then posed a question to all the panelists.

Q: "In your area of work, where is the room for improvement? What can you do better to further close the gender gap?"

Answers from the panelists:

Mr. Charles Vandi, Director of Gender Affairs at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone, said that he believes that the focus must continue to be on gender equality and women's empowerment, and emphasized the importance of unity. He shared that the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act of Sierra Leone strongly requires the establishment of a gender equality unit, whose main role is to collect disaggregated data and analyze data, and to ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed into departmental policies, laws, legislation and programmes. Through this approach, "We will be able to bridge the gap and close the challenges that are currently happening."

H.E Ambassador Ernest Mbaima Ndomahina emphasized the importance of collaboration and networking. The NaCSA (the National Commission for Social Action) has done well in this regard, he said, giving an example of the launch of a \$2.9 million Islamic microfinance program for women in Sierra Leone. Multilateral cooperation and establishing connections can enable Sierra Leone more advances in women's financing.

Ms. Abibatu Turay, head of the Consumer Protection Section within the Banking Supervision Department at the Bank of Sierra Leone for the National Financial Inclusion Strategy shared relevant information about financial literacy in Sierra Leone.

"Before coming here, we traveled to various province's cities in the East, West, North and South, noting Sierra Leone being a country with a large proportion of financial literacy. The bank has taken financial literacy and education as a priority area including digital financial literacy. We believe that improving greatly on financial literacy, will increase access to finance and increase our financial inclusion rates from 28.9% to more than 50% in the next two years. And in addition, digital financial literacy will even raise a higher percentage in this coming era."

Data and information will help improve guidance for financial institutions, she concluded.

Ms. Fofanah, CEO of Susue Women's Finance, said that she believes that international exchanges and collaboration are crucial.

"It is important that we share our stories not just in Sierra Leone but continue to take advantage of international platforms and showcase what we really have been doing in different areas. I believe that would Inspire other countries to come to us as a best practice country rather than us asking people to copy notes."

She reiterated the significance of developing financial products targeted at women and thanked everyone for their support and help. Expressing optimism, she concluded by saying that, "We have to have our Women's Green Bank to showcase to the world that we can also tackle women's access to finance and climate issues under the one roof...We will do this and I implore all the women here today and our supportive men and of course our partners. Thank you."

Ms. Behr from the World Bank answered the question about room for improvement by stating that Sierra

Leone still lags behind the world in two key areas: women's safety and child private care. Only by creating a safe environment for women can they become entrepreneurs and be empowered. Finally, she emphasized the importance of data portals including gender disaggregated data.

"Our knowledge is limited by the available data and the level of disaggregation of these data, because overall only what gets measured gets done."



Commentator Dr. Walter Reichman

After the panel discussion with Q and A, a statement was made by Dr. Walter Reichman, a Partner at OrgVitality and a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology, an NGO with consultative status to ECOSOC (the UN Economic and Social Council), who added a unique dimension to the panel by emphasizing the role of the private sector in advancing the power of women in economics and business.

Dr. Reichman explained his perspective in the context of his expertise as an organizational psychologist and in issues related to the eradication of poverty, as well as in his role working for a private sector consulting company whose focus is on helping companies understand and maximize gains from the ongoing process of employee involvement in their work and

in organizations. He reported interesting results from studies over the last 25 to 30 years that the more engaged employees are, the more successful the organization is, regardless of the metric used. Companies that have more engaged and loyal employees are more successful than those that do not, he explained. Relevant to the important issue of gender inequality being discussed in this event, he said, study results show that women generally participate in organizations more actively than men. While differences vary among organizations, he added, if there is one person taking the lead, it would be advantageous for this to be a woman.

The relationship of women in business and poverty is central, he said. In this regard, he made an important suggestion: If we are going to reduce the projected number of 340 million women and girls who will still be in poverty in 2030, then the private sector has to help.

"One of the ways to reduce that prevalence statistic about women and poverty is to provide long-term career opportunities for women to be successful in private enterprises." One of his company's recommendations – which was also brought out in the film shown in this event and expressed well by the panelists – is that engaging women contributes considerably to the development of a country and the eradication of poverty. This is based on the principle that there is a huge informal group of people comprising the informal economy and depending on which part of the world you're in, between 60% to 90% of the people in the informal economy are women.

Business organizations CEOs and managers need to: pay attention to women in the informal economy; encourage women to enter business organizations; provide women with the same opportunities as men; leverage women's strengths and help them develop new strengths and new capabilities; and ensure that women have a place in business organizations. He concluded by saying that given that women are equally capable as men of functioning in the business environment, by adopting these recommendations that support women in the economy, slowly but surely the culture of a country will change in a positive direction towards a stronger economy and a better society.

"As women become successful in business organizations, the culture of the country changes and improves."

Q and A session

One attendee was selected to ask a question before the closing remarks. The person, who belongs to the Office of UN Women in Sierra Leone, rather than asking a specific question, expressed her view on affirmative action.



(Right in yellow): Attendee making a statement "It's fantastic for women to have financing for their needs. We need to follow this up with more actions there but also economics. The normative tool to the GEWE Act is the Affirmative Act that creates the space in the market both public and private for women, which is a quota for women to have access to the Market in the formal sector and it goes with gender responsive procurement. The country has started working on it slowly and we need to push to the normative. I want to say something that I learned from one of my economic studies, that we create the informal so that the formal accounting system has the responsibility of accounting for what existed previously to colonization in Africa."

Closing Remarks

Closing Remarks were presented by *Mr. Gordon Tapper*, President of the United African Congress,

Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women cont.

Founder of Give Them a Hand Foundation, and a co-sponsor of the series of five events (of which this event is one) sponsored by the Government of Sierra Leone during the present CSW.



(left to right): Mr. Gordon Tapper, Ms. Naasu Genevieve Fofanah, H.E. Ambassador Ernest Mbaima Ndomahina, Ms. Anushe Khan

Mr. Tapper made several points. First, he lauded the proposal of President Bio of Sierra Leone in his first Medium-Term Plan to make Sierra Leone a middleincome country by the year 2039. Although this will take a lot of effort, Mr. Tapper said that he believes it is achievable. Secondly, he mentioned that the people cannot expect the Sierra Leone government to fund all the assistance required by financial institutions at reasonably low interest rates on its own. Instead, NGOs, communities, and civil society, will all need to work together to help the government achieve this goal, aligned with the mention by panelists about the need for cooperation. Along the theme of cooperation for development, he shared some projects he is developing in Sierra Leone with partners, including assisting women in financial advancement in the diamond industry and tourism industries. In summary, he expressed optimism about Sierra Leone's future.



Event co-sponsor and co-organizer Dr. Judy Kuriansky with panelist Ms. Naasu Genevieve Fofanah



IAAP senior and student representatives and event support team of Dr. Kuriansky's students(Back row, left to right): IAAP UN representative Dr. Walter Reichman, IAAP President Dr. Lori Foster, IAAP UN representative Russell Daisey, Columbia University Teachers College (TC) graduate students of Dr. Kuriansky, Zeever Baqar and Emma Gaskins, IAAP past President Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy, Dr. Kuriansky's TA Melissa Clark and graduate student Dahlia Alrawi (Front row): Dr. Judy Kuriansky (middle) with her graduate students Emily McGill (left) and Josefina Streeter

Personal Reflection of first author Elaine Peng

In the past few years, the Chinese government has provided a large amount of economic and technical assistance to the Sierra Leone government and forgiven a large amount of Sierra Leone's debt. As a Chinese international student with an undergraduate minor in business management, I have always been curious about Sierra Leone's economic policies, especially those aimed at solving female poverty.

I have gained a lot of information and improved my understanding about Sierra Leone at this event and over the series of events about Sierra Leone at this CSW conference. The first is about women's financial inequality. I admit I was shocked when it was mentioned that women in Sierra Leone had previously not had the right to have their own bank accounts. I am also saddened by what panelist Ms. Behr mentioned, that "Today across the world, 3.9 billion women -half of humanity - do not hold the same legal rights as men." The economy is the basis of many things, and economic inequality determines that women cannot have the same rights as men in many aspects. Perhaps if we only focus on a few developed countries, it seems that gender equality has gradually been realized, but looking at the world, we still need a lot of effort.

Secondly, I am heartened by all the efforts and changes I hear about that are happening in Sierra Leone. It's like reading the story of an adventurer. When the adventurer overcomes many difficulties and achieves victory and success, the reader will also feel excited and moved. Sierra Leone is a small country, but they are eager to change the status quo of female poverty through economic policies and have made a lot of progress. I think Sierra Leone has done a good job of communicating and presenting their achievements to the world and can be a role model and example for other countries to follow.

Finally, I am very interested in the concept of financial literacy as mentioned by Ms. Naasu Genevieve Fofanah. In fact, even though I was born

into a middle-class family, all of my knowledge about financial management came from taking courses in college. I think education and popularization in this area can be worthy of learning from developing countries as well as developed countries around the world. The principle of economic GDP growth is based on the increase in people's transactions. When financial-related knowledge becomes popular, the national economy will also grow with a greater probability. It is important to recognize all the ways that women play a major role in this progress.

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Author bios

Yilin (Elaine) Peng is a research assistant of the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, and a member of the International Association of Applied Psychology Division of Students and Early Career Professionals, who is pursuing a Master's degree in

Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women cont.

the Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College and is currently studying in Professor Judy Kuriansky's course on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she has experience working in teenager suicide prevention programs, and nonprofit organizations for exceptional children. She is interested in education and mental health and well-being among adolescents and children globally.

Charles Vandi is the Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs Republic of Sierra Leone, in Freetown, where he has served for the past 20 years.

Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations." She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Emma Gaskins, M.A., graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University Masters Program in Developmental Psychology with a background in educational and developmental psychology research. Previously, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina, earning a B.A. in psychology and a minor in English. Currently, she serves as the Co-Manager of Teachers College, Columbia University's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, actively contributing to advocacy initiatives for the advancement of youth mental health and well-being. These initiatives involve collaboration with ambassadors and delegates from United Nations mission offices, emphasizing the practical application of psychology in addressing global challenges. Her academic and professional interests seek to advance the development of youth, through educational settings, psychosocial interventions, or youth development programs. Her studies and research have focused on facilitating holistic, social-emotional approaches to learning and implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs, addressing multifaceted challenges faced by youth globally. Her goals are to implement programming which empowers young people to reach their full potential by encouraging positive growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

Gordon M. Tapper is the Founder and Chair of Give Them a Hand Foundation and President of the United African Congress. He served for over 35 years at the United Nations, including as Chief of Section in the Department of Administration and Management. He executive produces innumerable events at the

Addressing Feminized Poverty Through Financial Inclusion for Women cont.

UN, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week, working with the Mission of Sierra Leone, and for many others events, including "Africa Rise" and "Raise the Roof" promoting healthcare to remote communities; fundraising events for the Sierra Leone-Jamaica Youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, and for the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative; and for the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN).

Roselynn Finda Senesi is Deputy Secretary in the Sierra Leone Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, and has an extensive file covering many issues on behalf of the Mission, including about women and girls, and disabilities.

GBVIMS+ in Sierra Leone

Sujung Hwang, Charles Vandi, Judy Kuriansky, Emma Gaskins, Gordon Tapper and Roselynn Finda Senesi

How can gender-based violence (GBV) be effectively prevented and who are the stakeholders that should center their attention on this issue?

These questions are among many issues targeted in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (United Nations, n.d.).

An answer was provided at a side event at the 68th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) when the Government of Sierra Leone presented its unique rollout of a Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems+ (GBVIMS+), an online, cloud-hosted software application for GBV information management and case management (Unicef, n.d.). GBVIMS+ is a critical tool to prevent and track the incidence of GBV. Sierra Leone is the first government to adopt such a tool, a historic move by a government that addresses Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda which calls for the elimination of violence against women and which uses technology to achieve the goals.

The event, entitled "Sierra Leone's Experience in Rolling Out Innovative GBVIMS+ (Gender-Based Violence Information Management System)," was held on 22 March 2024 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, in a full-to-capacity Conference Room 6. In accordance with the CSW time guidelines, it lasted a short amount of time – an hour and 15 minutes, from 11:30AM-12:45PM, but nonetheless, compacted into that time an enormous amount of valuable and interesting information and a considerable number of speakers.



Flyer for the CSW event on "Sierra Leone's Experience in Rolling Out Innovative GBVIMS+

Objectives

The objectives of the event were to: showcase efforts made by Sierra Leone to prevent and respond to gender-based violence; describe the implementation and rollout of an innovative technology solution – the GBVIMS+ -- for the first-ever time by a government; share the journey in the contextualization of this GBVIMS+ in Sierra Leone; outline next steps; and encourage partnerships in these efforts.

The co-sponsors

The main sponsor of the event was the Government of Sierra Leone, specifically the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, with co-sponsorship of UN Agencies and various co-sponsors from civil society and academia. These included the UN agencies of UNICEF and UNFPA; international NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and Give Them A Hand Foundation (GTAHF); and academia, the Columbia University Teachers College Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab. This participation of government, UN agencies and civil society constituted a purposeful and valuable multi-stakeholder approach.

UNICEF is the primary United Nations agency dedicated to addressing the issues of children. UNFPA is the United Nations' primary sexual and reproductive health agency. The GTAH Foundation is an NGO that brings together members of the United Nations to aid those facing extreme poverty, poor health, and lack of education. IAAP is an international NGO that focuses on exchanging knowledge, collaborating on research, and advancing the application of psychology to address real-world problems, and which has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (www.iaapsy.org). The Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab is a research lab at Teachers College, Columbia University (TC), under the leadership of professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky (also a UN representative for IAAP, an advisor for the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN, and co-organizer of this event) that carries out multi stakeholder projects related to international psychological advocacy science, research, and practice. The latter provided logistic support for the event, in student teams expertly led by TC graduate Emma Gaskins, an IAAP student representative to the UN and former student in Dr. Kuriansky's class, also a co-author of this paper. Collectively, these organizations illuminated Sierra Leone's advances in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The event was one of five side events during this CSW session sponsored by the Government of Sierra Leone to address critical issues and advances by the government to address different targets identified by SDG5.

Event Description

The event consisted of an opening by the moderator, an opening statement, presentation of the process and implementation of the GBVISM+ tool, a panel discussion, Q and A session, and closing remarks.

Background

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the world's most widespread and devastating human rights violations. Globally, Sierra Leone ranks 162 out of 170 countries in the Gender Equality Index. Discriminatory social norms about appropriate roles and responsibilities for women and men are key contributors to gender-based violence in the country. According to the Sierra Leone Demographic Health Survey 2019, 60.7% of women and adolescent girls aged 15-49, have experienced physical violence and 7.4% have experienced sexual violence since aged 15. In 2019, His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Dr. Julius Maada Bio declared a National Emergency on Rape and Sexual Violence which culminated in the review and strengthening of the Sexual Offences Act 2012. Sierra Leone now has the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2019 with tougher penalties including up to life imprisonment for perpetrators of sexual offences.

GBVIMS+ (Gender-Based Violence Information Management Systems Plus) is an online, cloudhosted software application for GBV information management and case management. As a module of the Protection Related Information Management System (Primero), GBVIMS+ helps GBV service providers securely and safely collect, store, manage, and share GBV data related to incidences of GBV, with the "plus" indicating a technological advance that goes beyond incident monitoring to include more features and security for GBVC case management.

The system includes functions for remote supervision and electronic referrals between service providers, while simultaneously allowing for more systematic monitoring and analysis of trends in reported cases. Launched in 2015, GBVIMS+ has been deployed in 19 humanitarian context globally serving over 80 user organizations. With the generous support of UNICEF and UNFPA in Sierra Leone and under the technical leadership of the global GBVIMS Steering Committee, the rollout in Sierra Leone in May 2023 marks the historic first-ever deployment of GBVIMS+ for government use.



GBVIMS+ tool (Charles Vandi slideshow)

As Sierra Leone made history as the first country in the world to have successfully contextualized and operationalized the GBVIMS+ in a development setting, its experience is a model for other countries.

The Government of Sierra Leone launched the GBVIMS+ on May 29, 2023, to build on gains already made in strengthening the GBV response in the country by multiple partners under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs including: scaling up of One Stop Centers, specialized police and judicial capacity, community-based prevention and social mobilization efforts.



The GBVIMS+ (from Charles Vandi slideshow; Emma Gaskins doing tech)

Event Speakers

The speakers were:

Honorable Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

Mr. Charles Vandi, Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

Madame Mariatu Bangura, the Chief Director of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Welfare, representing Honorable Melrose Kaminty, Minister of Social Welfare, Republic of Sierra Leone who could not be present Mr. Daniel Kettor, Executive Director, Rainbo Initiative

Ms. Christine Heckman, Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Specialist, UNICEF

Ms. Dawn Minott, Advisor, Gender-Based Violence Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, UNFPA

Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; Professor, Teachers College Columbia University; and IAAP representative at the UN



Speakers; (bottom row, left to right): Ms. Dawn Minnott, Hon. Isata Mahoi, Ambassador Victoria Sulimani, Madame Mariatu Bangura, Ms. Christine Heckman; (top row, left to right): Mr. Daniel Kettor, Dr. Judy Kuriansky

Orange Scarfs

All the speakers were given an orange scarf, which they all donned. Orange is the color selected for

the annual global campaign "UNITE to End Violence against Women" that symbolizes optimism and commitment to a future free from violence against women and girls (UN Women, n.d.).



Opening Remarks

The moderator for the event was Her Excellency Ambassador Victoria Mangay Sulimani, Director-General and Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone. She welcomed the full-tocapacity room attendees and gave an overview of the event. She explained the purpose of the event to:

Highlight the innovative efforts of the government of Sierra Leone in responding to gender-based violence

Contextualize the GBVIMS+ tool

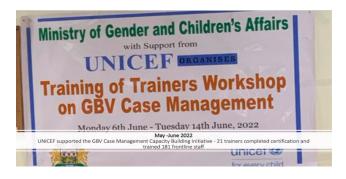
Showcase the government-led rollout of the tool nation-wide

Elaborate on the implementation and future considerations of this initiative

Then, Ambassador Sulemani welcomed Honorable Dr. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs for the Republic of Sierra Leone, to give the opening statement. Minister Mahoi emphasized the significance of the Sierra Leonean efforts to combat GBV by saying that her nation is the "first in the world to have successfully rolled out the GBVIMS+ in a non-humanitarian context under the leadership of the government." She explained how this has been a collaborative effort between the government and the UN agencies of UNICEF and UNFPA, both of whom will speak at this panel. She pointed out that this initiative has aligned with the government's many efforts to achieve the SDG 5 goal of gender equality and the empowerment and protection of women and girls.



Event moderator Ambassador Dr. Victoria Sulimani, Director-General and Ambassador-at-Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Republic of Sierra Leone.



UNICEF's partnership with Sierra Leone to combat GBV (Charles Vandi slideshow)

Minister Mahoi proceeded to describe genderbased violence as a "menace" to be fought against together, at every level and in every sector of society. To accomplish this, she noted plans of her Ministry

for scaling up the initiative to a national level from its implementation currently in three districts of Sierra Leone (Kailahun, Bo, and the Western Area). She also applauded the efforts of many multistakeholder partners who comprise a technical working group to implement the GBVIMS+ tool and utilize it on-the-ground. These include Sierra Leone ministries (of Social Welfare and of Health), UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF), and both national and international non-governmental organizations (Rainbo Initiative, Commit and Act Foundation, World Hope International, International Rescue Committee, Defence for Children International, World Vision, SigiCall, Plan International, Save the Children and the Aberdeen Women's Center).

In appreciating their collaboration and intense efforts, she explained that this tool has been used to provide service providers the valuable opportunity to share information and make referrals for victims of gender-based violence ethically and safely.



Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

In addition to the implementation of this important tool, she described other government-level efforts in Sierra Leone to combat GBV. These include training frontline staff on survival-centered case management and a "116" hotline for reporting GBV, as well as legal and policy actions to support these initiatives. While highlighting the triumphs of Sierra Leonean efforts against GBV, she ended her statement by inviting collaboration from new and existing institutional partners to assist in scaling up these initiatives. Through such cooperative efforts, she emphasized, government-level initiatives can effectively serve diverse vulnerable populations-women, children, and those with disabilities.

Moderator Ambassador Sulemani adeptly underscored Minister Mahoi's statement, noting that initiatives like the GBVIMS+ prove the value of employing technology in today's society. She also

mentioned the importance of aligning projects with international regulations.

"We are a small country with a big heart," Ambassador Sulemani declared, in describing how Sierra Leone is taking bold steps to end all forms of violations against children and women. This catchy phrase would later be reprised by Dr. Kuriansky in her closing remarks, that bookend this event and also characterize the five events in the past two weeks about Sierra Leone's impressive accomplishment to achieve SDG5.



Mr. Charles Vandi, Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

Using a Powerpoint presentation, he first described how the GBVIMS+ system was planned and implemented in Sierra Leone.

He reported that Sierra Leone's low gender equality index had ranked 162 out of 170. Also, statistics have shown that 60.7% of Sierra Leonean women and adolescent girls aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence and 7.4% have experienced sexual violence, with these numbers revealing that the country is in a GBV crisis (Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2019). To combat this crisis, the government of Sierra Leone introduced GBVIMS+ under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in Sierra Leone.

Then, he shared the contextual background about how the decision-making processes by the government was made. On 7 February 2019, Sierra Leone President Dr. Julius Maada Bio declared a State of Emergency against sexual violence and rape in the country, with the intention of filling in the gaps and disparities in services, coordination, and management of information of gender-based violence responses. In order to respond to these needs, the Sierra Leone Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs requested support from UNICEF and UNFPA for the rollout of GBVIMS+ and to develop a technical committee for the system in February 2021.



GBVIMS+ team in Febuary 2021 outside the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (Charles Vandi slideshow)



Team for the May 2023 Launch of GBVIMS+ pilot in districts of Sierra Leone (Charles Vandi slideshow)

The timeline for the planning and implementation is as follows:

In February 2022, a scoping mission was conducted to review existing GBV services, needs, and other resources in order to develop a sustainable plan for GBVIMS+. From May through June 2022, a training of trainers (ToT) workshop on GBV case management capacity building initiative was done for civil society organizations and governmental staff with the support of UNICEF.

In December 2022, the UNICEF Headquarters mission confirmed that the tools that would be used for GBVIMS+ for a digital GBV referral pathway.

In February 2023, another UNICEF Headquarters mission trained 20 staff members on the usage of GBVIMS+ for piloting in three districts in Sierra Leone (Kailahun, Bo, and Freetown).

February 2022 :

GBV services

agencies

collection; etc.)

Scoping mission conducted to look at:

Gaps and needs for capacity building for government and CSOs GBV case management process across different government ministries and

GBV data flow (how data is collected, stored, analyzed, and shared; wha forms are used; barriers to data

Review existing human, material, and financial resources for the rollout.

Develop an implementation and ustainability plan for the GBVIMS+



GBVIMS+ implementation timeline (Charles Vandi slideshow)



The results of an evaluation of the pilot showed that the GBVIMS+ tool was proven successful in harmonizing and managing GBV cases and services across service providers.

An added crucial approach to combat the crisis of violence against women and girls, he said, is that collaboration is needed between men and women.

Mr. Vandi concluded his presentation by emphasizing the importance of improving the GBV case data sharing process in order to secure the ethics and safety of GBV survivors.



Madame Mariatu Bangura, Chief Director of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Welfare

Panel Discussion

Transitioning to the panel, the moderator gave the floor to Madame Mariatu Bangura, Chief Director of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Welfare, who represented Hon. Melrose Karminty, Minister of Social Welfare of the Republic of Sierra Leone (who could not be present), to discuss the sustainability of the GBVIMS+ through partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), other government ministries and other institutions. She emphasized this partnership as a valuable way to further strengthen the efficiency and accountability in capacity-building through training on the new system.

The next panelist to speak was Mr. Daniel Kettor, Executive Director of the Rainbo Initiative, who presented about their partnership as a civil society organization representative on this project. Rainbo Initiative is a national NGO in Sierra Leone working to end SGBV (sexual and gender-based violence) through medical and psychosocial services for SGBV survivors (Rainbo Initiative, 2020).

His organization has provided services to SGBV survivors in Sierra Leone for more than 20 years, and also has collected data to inform the government and to advocate about these issues. He shared the difficulties in the past when data collection to facilitate services for their beneficiaries were all recorded manually, resulting in an incoherent management system across districts. Thus, he applauded this transition to a new digitalized data system, which efficiently unifies how data is managed. Importantly, partnership with the government and his local civil society organization is key and is an excellent model.



Mr. Daniel Kettor, Executive Director, Rainbo Initiative

The moderator then gave the floor to Ms. Christine Heckman, a Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Specialist at UNICEF, to talk about the technical

working group for GBVIMS+. Ms. Heckman described how the working group ensured that GBV survivors had access to quality services and referrals, noting the importance of the ethics and safety of the data. She also highlighted how the technical working group confirmed the alignment of the system with international standards and protocols, based on existing global tools. This has been the foundation for ongoing support for users, service providers and GBV survivors.



Ms. Christine Heckman, Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Specialist, Unicef

Next, Ms. Dawn Minott, Advisor of the Gender-Based Violence Humanitarian-Development- Peace Nexus in UNFPA, presented about important sustainability and evidence-based strategies for Sierra Leone's GBVIMS+. These include:

Online coaching and training

Partnerships with other CSOs/NGOs to share expertise

Future considerations for partnerships with the private sector

Advocacy and policy to align with efforts to prevent GBV violations

Continuous Monitoring & Evaluation (commonly

referred to as "M and E") to assess user capacity and effectiveness through a "data driven approach"



Ms. Dawn Minott, Advisor, Gender-Based Violence Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, UNFPA



Attendees at event (left to right): Dr.Kuriansky's student event assistants Montse Gonzalez-Alonso and Jenna Wettstein; IAAP past President Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy; attendee; co-sponsor Gordon Tapper

Q&A Session

The moderator transitioned to a Q&A session with the audience to pose their questions -- which were collated as is the usual practice in UN meetings -- and answered by the panelists.

Questions raised by the attendees included:

How is the information gathered from GBVIMS+ used to help the survivors but also to re-educate the people of Sierra Leone against GBV?

Is there a juxtaposition between Sierra Leone's *'Hands off Our Girls'* campaign spearheaded by Sierra Leone First Lady Dr. Fatima Maada Bio, and evidently a "hands-on" initiative by the government?

How is the provision of psychological support provided for GBV survivors in Sierra Leone?

How will remote, distant villages in Sierra Leone be able to benefit from the program?

How can we educate boys on GBV and to become responsible men?

Minister Mahoi responded to these questions by elaborating about how the technical working group has been focusing on community engagement, while also acknowledging gaps in psychological support and services in Sierra Leone. She mentioned that alternative platforms (e.g. offline applications) are considered to reach distant villages. In answer to the last question, she emphasized an engagement strategy for males and about parenting to bring both men and women together to participate in the issue of GBV prevention.

Mr. Daniel Kettor offered a response to the questions on community engagement and education, noting how his organization has found that it is not enough to present the numbers on the issue. Rather, he said, "When you relate the data, tell the community that it could happen to somebody you know; then, the people become very active" about the issue. He added that advocacy and education on GBV can be done through various methods but should always present data in a personal and appropriate way to the community.

After the Q&A session, Ambassador Sulemani gave the floor to Dr. Judy Kuriansky to make closing remarks. Kuriansky is well familiar with Sierra Leone, having been to the country over many years, being involved in many social development projects and plans, and providing psychosocial support workshops and training for communities especially after disasters. She currently serves as an Advisor to the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and policy advisor to Ambassador Sidique Wai, the Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. Also wearing an academic hat, Kuriansky is a Professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers College Columbia University. She themed her remarks quoting the catchy phrase made by Ambassador Sulemani at the open of the event, that Sierra Leone is indeed a "Small country with a big heart," evident from this event that has capped all the past four side events co-sponsored by Sierra Leone during this year's CSW68, which collectively have indeed shown the impressive accomplishments of Sierra Leone in addressing many aspects of SDG 5 to empower and protect women and girls.



Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; IAAP UN representative; and Professor, Teachers College Columbia University

These have been about the Gender Equality and Empowerment Act, financial inclusion of women, bridging gender disparities and ending all forms of violence against women and girls, and five big game changers that guide the country's development plan.

She emphasized that this side event is not only on the concluding day of the two-week long CSW68 conference, but also marks the "conclusion of a tremendous accomplishment for Sierra Leone" in addressing advances for women and girls in all

aspects of development. These have been done under the exceptional and innovative leadership of President Julius Maada Bio, who is a champion of women's rights, to adopt "first-evers" for government, exemplified in implementing this GBVIMS+ innovation as well as another "first-ever" in the exceptional adoption of General Assembly resolutions on access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, and on zero tolerance for child sexual abuse, spearheaded by First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio.



Speakers joined by attendees at the event

Dr. Kuriansky concluded her remarks by applauding the collaborative efforts between the government ministries of Sierra Leone, UN agencies, and civil society organizations, which embody the spirit of the UN of multilateralism and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Further, she acknowledged the exceptional assistance of youth - the inclusion of which is also championed by the UN - namely, the teams of her students at Teachers College Columbia University and her Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab who are also members of the IAAP youth division, led by Emma Gaskins who provided unending 24/7 support for these series of events about the advances in SDG5 by Sierra Leone. This multistakeholder collaboration has been exemplary throughout the CSW Sierra Leone-sponsored events as a model for such historic advances.

This side event highlighted the promise of an innovative technological tool to address the issue of gender-based violence. It also addressed several Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda. These include SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 3 (Good

health and wellbeing); SDG 8 (economic growth) and SDG 17 about the importance of partnerships between government and the public and nonprofit sector in responding to the needs and ensuring protection of the people of Sierra Leone, and especially of women and girls, as a means to socioeconomic development and well-being of the population and the country.



Dr. Judy Kuriansky (center in blue) with her students (from left to right): Jenna Wettstein, Dahlia Alrawi, Montse Gonzalez-Alonso, Zeever Baqar, Emily McGill, Josefina Streeter, Meizhu Lu, and Emma Gaskins. In back row but not visible: IAAP's Russell Daisey and Dr. Christine Roland-Levy

Personal Reflections of first author Sujung Hwang

As a graduate student at Teachers College Columbia University in the master's degree in International and Comparative Education, who is aspiring to work in the nonprofit sector, this CSW68 Sierra Leone side event gave me the opportunity to view the importance of community engagement and civil society partnerships for service provision and advocacy for women's rights. It was also inspiring for me to see how multiple governmental, international non-governmental and civil society organizations came together to cooperate and respond to sexual gender-based violence through an innovative technology project (GBVIMS+) and also by working on-the-ground with an emphasis on safety of survivors, ethical data-sharing, and sustainable and efficient advocacy and education through training

staff and presenting data to community members. The panelists' presentations and responses to the audience were also helpful in recognizing roles that educators and psychologists can play in the fight to counter ignorance about the harmful effects of GBV. The fact that discussion touched on various aspects of basic human rights and needs (education, psychological support, women and children's rights) overall helped me recognize the importance of such collaborative efforts to achieve gender rights on the national and international level.

EVENT OVERVIEW

TITLE: United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68): Sierra Leone's Experience in Rolling Out Innovative GBVIMS+

Date/Time: Friday, 22 March 2024, 11:30AM-12:45PM EDT

Location: United Nations Headquarters, New York City, Conference Room 6

Moderator: Ambassador Dr. Victoria Sulimani, Director-General and Ambassador-at-Large

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Republic of Sierra Leone Speakers:

Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

Mr. Charles Vandi, Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

Republic of Sierra Leone

Madame Mariatu Bangura, the Chief Director of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Welfare, and **Representative for Hon. Melrose Kaminty,** Minister of Social Welfare, Republic of Sierra Leone

Mr. Daniel Kettor, Executive Director, Rainbo Initiative

Ms. Christine Heckman, Gender-based Violence in Emergencies Specialist, UNICEF

Ms. Dawn Minott, Advisor, Gender-Based Violence Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, UNFPA

Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; Professor, Teachers College Columbia University; IAAP UN representative

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Author Bios

Sujung Hwang is a student pursuing a masters' degree in International and Comparative Education at Teachers College Columbia University and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." Her interests and research experience center on refugee education and resettlement, and psychosocial support and social-emotional learning in education in emergencies.

Charles Vandi is the Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

Republic of Sierra Leone, in Freetown, where he has served for the past 20 years.

Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations." She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the

Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Emma Gaskins, M.A. graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University Masters Program in Developmental Psychology with a background in educational and developmental psychology research. Previously, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina, earning a B.A. in psychology and a minor in English. Currently, she serves as the Co-Manager of Teachers College, Columbia University's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, actively contributing to advocacy initiatives for the advancement of youth mental health and well-being. These initiatives involve collaboration with ambassadors and delegates from United Nations mission offices, emphasizing the practical application of psychology in addressing global challenges. Her academic and professional interests seek to advance the development of youth, through educational settings, psychosocial interventions, or youth development programs. Her studies and research have focused on facilitating holistic, social-emotional approaches to learning and implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs, addressing multifaceted challenges faced by youth globally. Her goals are to implement programming which empowers young people to reach their full potential by encouraging positive growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

Gordon M. Tapper is the Founder and Chair of Give Them a Hand Foundation and President of the United African Congress. He served for over 35 years at the United Nations, including as Chief of Section in the Department of Administration and Management. He executive produces innumerable events at the UN, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week, working with the Mission of Sierra Leone, and for many others events, including "Africa Rise" and "Raise the Roof" promoting healthcare to remote communities; fundraising events for the Sierra Leone-Jamaica Youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, and for the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative; and for the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN).

Roselynn Finda Senesi is Deputy Secretary in the Sierra Leone Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, and has an extensive file covering many issues on behalf of the Mission, including about women and girls, and disabilities.

Bridging Gender Disparities and Combatting Trafficking and Exploitation: A United Nations event during the UN Commission on the Status of Women

featuring the case of Sierra Leone

Jenna Wettstein, Francis Kabia, Judy Kuriansky, Emma Gaskins, Gordon M. Tapper and Roselynn Finda Sensei

Introduction

In the shadows of our world, a sinister trade thrives, exploiting the most vulnerable among us and shattering lives with its ruthless grip: human trafficking. Human trafficking affects every country in the world, devastates victims and robs communities of a sense of security. It is a severe criminal justice and human rights abuse issue that compromises national and economic security by undermining the rule of law and well-being of individuals, communities and societies (UNODC, 2011).

Human trafficking, exploitation and gender disparity present a vicious and intersecting crisis whereby human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of exploitation; exploitation includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse; and gender disparity refers to the unequal views or treatment of persons based on their gender.

The trafficking of persons is a gendered phenomenon, since victims are primarily women and girls. Globally, an estimated 28 million people are trapped in various forms of trafficking (United Nations Sierra Leone, 2023) with women and girls representing 71% of globally trafficked victims (UNODC, 2016). The disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking is due to many factors, including poverty, social and gender norms (patriarchal structures), discrimination and lack of legal protection which in turn affects their access to education, and financial and other resources (Gacinya, 2020; UNODC, 2008). However, measures can be taken – by government and partners – to stop this abuse. The Government of Sierra Leone has made impressive strides in this regard, with a laser focus on the rights and protection of women and girls as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Model policies and programs to protect women and girls from this scourge have been championed by the President of the country His Excellency Julius Maada Bio, under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Welfare, with partners, which are presented and discussed in this event.

Event Overview

The event in this report, entitled "Bridging Gender Disparities and Combating Trafficking and Exploitation Across Different Platforms Through Policy Development and Social Protection Interventions," was sponsored by Sierra Leone and took place during the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to address this serious issue.

The Commission on the Status of Women is a twoweek long yearly gathering in March held at the United Nations headquarters in New York organized by UN Women, the UN agency mandated to promote gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment that are outlined, in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) of the UN 2030 Agenda. Governments and civil society representatives from all over the world gather to discuss problems and solutions. The theme for CSW68 was "accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing

poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective" (UN Women, 2024).

The event was held in person on Thursday, 21 March 2024, at the UN headquarters in Conference Room D. The well-attended event was limited to an hour and fifteen minutes, as per the requirements of UN Women. It was recorded and subsequently posted on Youtube.

This event was one of an impressive number of five events sponsored by the Government of Sierra Leone during CSW that highlighted advances the Sierra Leone government and their partners are making in achieving SDG5, in the areas of legislation and innovative initiatives for financial and social protections, policies and programs for women and girls.

This event consisted of six parts: Part I: Moderator Opening remarks; Part II: Speaker Statement; Part III: Keynote Statement; Part IV: Video Presentation; Part V: Panelist Discussion; VI: Closing Remarks. Objectives

The objectives of the event were to:

- Raise global awareness about the issue of social and gender disparities as they correlate to gender roles and the empowerment of women and girls, and trafficking across different platforms
- Highlight Sierra Leone's efforts in addressing the crimes of trafficking and exploitation of women and girls in all forms
- Provide a platform for stakeholders to share experiences, challenges faced and lessons learned in combating trafficking in Sierra Leone
- Indicate preventative measures in Sierra Leone allocated to facilitate gender equality and women empowerment
- Highlight the importance of societal safeguarding systems

Advance advocacy on these issues by engaging multiple stakeholders in the spirit of SDG 17, including policymakers, funding agencies, and others, to garner support for effective countertrafficking measures across different platforms in the country of Sierra Leone

Facilitate collaboration and networking opportunities among diverse stakeholders and the event cosponsors, including local, national and international organizations, governments, NGOs, Mission 89, and civil society to foster collaboration and enhance collective efforts against trafficking and gender equality globally.

Sponsors

Joining the main sponsor, the government of Sierra Leone and the Mistry of Gender and Youth Affairs, were co-sponsors: the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mission 89, the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), Give Them A Hand (GTAH) Foundation, and the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University.



Logos of the co-sponsors

The Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a United Nations agency responsible for combating illicit drugs and international crime. The United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. Mission 89 is a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to combating child trafficking in the sports industry. The GTAH Foundation is an NGO that seeks to bring together members of the United Nations to aid those facing extreme poverty, poor health, and lack of education. The International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) is an NGO that focuses on exchanging

knowledge, collaborating on research, and advancing the application of psychology to address real-world problems, and which has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).The Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab is a research Lab at Teachers College, Columbia University (TC), under the leadership of professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky (also a UN representative for IAAP and an advisor for the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN) that carries out multi stakeholder projects related to international psychological advocacy science, research, and practice. Notably, the latter provided extensive logistic support for the event, in student teams led by TC graduate Emma Gaskins, an IAAP student representative to the UN and former student in Dr. Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." Collectively, these organizations illuminated Sierra Leone's endeavors to establish fair and inclusive environments for women, concurrently combating trafficking and exploitation.

The United Nations Agenda

The overarching goal of the event was to raise global awareness on social and gender disparities and to showcase effective strategies employed by Sierra Leone, with collaborative institutions, to combat trafficking and exploitation. The event served as a valuable platform for stakeholders to share experiences and propose future strategies for tackling the issues of trafficking and exploitation of women and girls in Sierra Leone, which emphasize the importance of societal safeguarding systems and the need to advance advocacy and collaboration to strength efforts and further progress.

The objectives of the event aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and specific goals which are at the root of the problem and solutions about trafficking and exploitation (United Nations, n.d.). These include:

SDG 5: Gender Equality - to end all forms of gender inequality and empower all women and girls

SDG 4: Quality Education - to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth - to promote sustainable, inclusive economic growth, create opportunities for decent and productive work for all individuals including women, youth and persons with disabilities and eradicate forced labor/ child labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities - to build more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to the common good



SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions - to create more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies where the rule of law is upheld, human rights are respected, and institutions are accountable and responsive to the needs of all individuals and communities

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals - to strengthen global partnerships, mobilize resources, and

enhance cooperation to accelerate progress towards sustainable development goals

In order to abolish trafficking and exploitation, specifically in Sierra Leone, progress has to be made in these areas.

Panelists in this event presented how Sierra Leone has taken steps to address gender disparity and

to empower women and girls through policy development and social interventions (SDG 5 & 10). Policies and programs focus on education (SDG 4), economic empowerment (SDG 8), and legal protections for women's rights (SDG 16). Social interventions involve community-based programs, awareness campaigns, and partnerships with NGOs and international organizations (SDG 17). While challenges persist, the speakers showed a clear commitment to progress in these areas in Sierra Leone.



Panelists (left to right) Mrs. Lerina Bright, His Excellency Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina, His Excellency Ambassador Amara Sowa, Hon, Ms. Melrose Karminty, Mr. Par Liljert and Ms. Delphine Schantz

Speakers:

- His Excellency Ambassador Amara Sheikh Mohammed Sowa, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations (Moderator/Opening Remarks)
- Mr. Par Liljert, Director, International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Statement)
- Hon. Ms. Melrose Karminty, Minister of Social Welfare in Sierra Leone (Keynote Statement)
- Ms. Delphine Schantz, Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Panelist)
- His Excellency. Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina, Commissioner of the National Commission for Social Action, Sierra Leone (Panelist)

• Mrs. Lerina Bright, Founder and Executive Director of Mission 89 (Panelist)

Opening Remarks: "Today we know that a very challenging global concern is the issue of trafficking." – Moderator, His Excellency Ambassador Amara Sowa



Moderator Ambassador Amara Sowa

The event commenced with opening remarks delivered by the moderator, His Excellency Ambassador Amara Sheikh Mohammed Sowa, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. Ambassador Sowa welcomed everyone to the event on behalf of the Sierra Leone government and their event partners. He introduced the topics of gender disparities, trafficking, and exploitation, emphasizing the seriousness of the issue at hand, since trafficking affects millions of people worldwide and violates their fundamental human rights.

"Today we know that a very challenging global concern is the issue of trafficking," he declared.

He explained that his purpose here today was to listen to the people involved in the policy work and programmes to combat these issues, and to gain knowledge to work towards better solutions to these grave problems. Ambassador Sowa then gave the floor to IOM's Mr. Par Lijert to make an opening statement.

Statement by The International Organization for Migration Office to United Nations in New York

Mr. Liljert is the Director of the International Organization for Migration Office (IOM) to the United Nations in New York. As the leading organization within the United Nations system promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all, IOM works with many partners to prevent trafficking in persons and to protect victims and survivors. Together with these partners, he said, IOM has directly assisted over 100,00 trafficked persons worldwide. He emphasized that 3 in 5 of the survivors assisted have been women and girls, which speaks to the persistence of gender inequality in trafficking.



Mr. Par Liljert, Director of the IMO to UN in NY

Mr. Liljert's statement centered around SDG 10.7 which highlights the responsibility to facilitate orderly safe and responsible migration and mobility of people. Of note, these issues are addressed in

the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Trafficking is a significant issue within the broader context of migration, he explained Migrants, especially women and girls, are more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking due to several factors, including poverty, lack of resources, lack of support networks, and language barriers. A solution, he said, can be found in the development and monitoring of safe and regular pathways for labor migration. This would progress SDG 8 by investment in the labor force which facilitates the strengthening of skills and cultural diversity whilst limiting the opportunity for trafficking.

This point relates to the question he posed: "Are we ready to pay more for products if they can guarantee us that there is no labor exploitation in their supplies?" he said.

"We all have a significant role to play," he said, emphasizing partnership.

Since 2004, the IOM has worked with the Government of Sierra Leone to achieve anti-trafficking efforts, including:

The provision of return and reintegration assistance and protection services to over 190 female and male victims of trafficking

Capacity-building for the National Anti-Trafficking In-Person Task Force Secretariat and the District Tasks Forces in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone.

Helpful measures in this regard include that an increase in the number of investigators and prosecutors involved in trafficking cases facilitates the improvement of anti-trafficking efforts and enforcement of penalties for trafficking offenders. Stiffer penalties help deter citizens of Sierra Leone from engaging in the heinous crime of trafficking.

Technical and financial support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Regional Conference hosted by Sierra Leone on trafficking in persons

Support for the launch of the Victims of Human Trafficking Trust Fund in collaboration with The Office of The First Lady (Fatima Maada Bio) in the, Republic of Sierra Leone

While significant achievements have been made, Mr. Liljert admitted that gaps still remain in countering trafficking responses around the world. Community development interventions that aim to prevent human trafficking at the root cause of gender inequalities and social vulnerability continue to need improvement and would strengthen Sierra Leone's efforts.

Mr. Liljert closed his statement by pledging on behalf of the IOM to continue their solidarity and support to all victims in order to end trafficking and exploitation in Sierra Leone.

Keynote Statement: "We all have to stand together and press for accountability. Human trafficking affects us all. Its impact ripples across the fabric of our global community." - Hon. Melrose Karminty

The keynote statement was delivered by Hon. Melrose Karminty, Minister of Social Welfare of the Republic of Sierra Leone. She provided a comprehensive summary outlining the trafficking and exploitation of women in Sierra Leone, encompassing statistical information, trends, and primary obstacles. Additionally, she presented an outline of policy formation and societal intervention in Sierra Leone aimed at eliminating gender disparity and advancing the empowerment of women. She highlighted both the efforts of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Sierra Leone as well as the progress of the Sierra Leone government in combating the issues at hand.



Hon. Melrose Karminty and (in back row) student team lead Emma Gaskins

Efforts of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Sierra Leone

The efforts of the Ministry of Social Welfare in Sierra Leone as outlined by Minister Karminty were:

Continuation of the roll-out and implementation of measures related toanti-trafficking to promote national and economic security, improvement of the rule of law, and advancing the rights, well-being, and dignity of all people

Tracking Statistical Analyses & Trends to create a baseline to track progress in reducing the problem. The relevant data is derived from collaborative reports and research initiatives, including that:

Reports reveal that every year Sierra Leone is a source of transit and destination country for several trafficked women and children for forced labor and sexual exploitation (U.S. Department of State, 2023)

33% of children aged 5 to 17 in Sierra Leone's Eastern Province are estimated to have experienced child trafficking and 36% to have experienced child labor (University of Georgia, 2022).

The Ministry maintains partnerships with various stakeholders, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on migration matters, to facilitate the repatriation of victims. This collaboration extends to offering psychosocial support, counseling, family tracing and reunification, and assisting with reintegration into communities. Additionally, the Ministry collaborates with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to provide emergency cash transfers, specifically targeting women, including those who are victims of trafficking.

Progress by the Government of Sierra Leone

Considerable progress has been made by the government and partners to combat human trafficking through policy formation and program implementation in Sierra Leone. These include:

Enactment of Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act of 2022

This Act covers abuses in societal structures that facilitate the exploitation and trafficking of children in the country. An example is informal fostering, where children are raised in households separate from their biological parents, typically with extended family or friends. This informal fostering arrangement is known as men pikin in Sierra Leone's native Krio language, a common practice in West African countries viewed as a way for parents to improve their children's lives. While this tradition can be beneficial to a child, it is the most commonly abused societal structure in the exploitation and trafficking of children in Sierra Leone (Gale, 2008). The Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act of 2022 was enacted to cover provisions such as informal fostering and to increase penalties for perpetrators of trafficking crimes such as removing the option to offer a fine in lieu of imprisonment for convicted traffickers.

Establishment of National Task Force on Human Trafficking

This task force is in all 16 districts across Sierra Leone and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of new legislation.

The National Task Force is in addition to the National Anti-Trafficking In-Person Task Force Secretariat highlighted by Mr. Liljert.

This targeted strategy enables Sierra Leone to allocate resources more effectively towards combating human trafficking, particularly in the



realms of prosecution and the delivery of victim services, with a strong emphasis on providing for women and children.

Awareness Campaigns & Collaboration

In an historic move, Sierra Leone organized the first national in-person conference on trafficking. A significant result of this conference was the formulation of a National Anti-trafficking Strategy aimed at diminishing instances of human trafficking and irregular migration across all levels. This conference led to the development of a series of anti-trafficking policy guidelines known as the Free Town Road Map to End Human Trafficking in the sub-region.

Improved Reporting Mechanisms for Suspected Cases

This improvement has been implemented through a dedicated, free, anti-trafficking hotline and freedom line.

Sierra Leone has implemented the National Referral Mechanism, establishing a systematic framework to guide all institutions and groups involved in combating human trafficking in their daily management of potential trafficking cases.

Victims of Human Trafficking Trust Fund

This Trust Fund was launched in February 2024 by the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Her Excellency Fatima Maada Bio, through the Ministry of Social Welfare and their anti-trafficking in-person Task Force Secretariat. The fund provides protection services for victims of human trafficking.

In looking towards the future, Minister Karminty said, the Government of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Social Welfare intend to progress in these efforts and accelerate service delivery to vulnerable groups. The Ministry has developed a 5-year strategic plan from 2024 to 2028 that prioritizes combating trafficking in persons.

Panelist Discussion

Panelists from relevant government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations shared successful strategies, initiatives, and best practices in combating trafficking and exploitation. Each panelist discussed challenges encountered during implementation and ways to overcome them.

Panelist #1

The first Panelist to speak was Ms. Delhanie Schantz, Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in New York.

Ms. Schantz spoke of the technical assistance work that the UNODC is doing to assist authorities in curbing the scope of trafficking in Sierra Leone and to recognize the processes taking place elsewhere that are connected to the issue of human trafficking. She praised Sierra Leone for efforts they are making to prioritize and combat trafficking.



(left to right); student organizing team member Monste Ginzalez-Alonso, speaker Ms. Delphine Schanta, report first author Jenna Wettstein

The UNODC office in Western Central Africa is implementing a project in four districts of Sierra Leone: Kenema, Kailahun, Kono, and Kambia. Fully funded by the University of Georgia, the project is aimed at countering child trafficking for labor exploitation. It involves the development and rollout of a training manual of trafficking in persons with emphasis on child trafficking and in turn, the development of an aligned community of practice in Sierra Leone.

"It is Important to remember that it is not the responsibility of women and girls to do something to prevent themselves from being trafficked," Ms. Schantz said. Ms. Schantz suggested that the crime of trafficking and exploitation needs to be addressed in line with Article 9 of the Trafficking Protocol which calls upon states to address the "supply-demand" that underlies all forms of exploitation. On one side of the trafficking process lies the "supply" factors, originating from the place where trafficking begins, which pertain to an individual's susceptibility to recruitment or involvement in criminal activities. On the other end are the "demand" factors, originating from the destination, which drives the exploitation of trafficked individuals (UNODC, 2000). It is imperative, she said, to address underlying demand factors for all forms of exploitation in Sierra Leone, through robust legal frameworks and monitoring systems, effective investigation, and prosecution.

To empower trafficked individuals to transition from being a victim to being a survivor, she said, a comprehensive process must be followed. This transition requires providing assistance and protection, which entails comprehensive support for their physical, psychological, and social recovery, ensuring their rights are respected, and offering compensation for the harm endured.

Panelist #2 - "I want to extend my appreciation to you ladies because you are very strategic and dynamic in all of this. We cannot move forward, we cannot do anything without you." - His Excellency Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomanhina

The next panelist to speak was His Excellency Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina, Commissioner of the National Commission for Social Action in Sierra Leone.

The question posed to H.E. Ndomahina by Ambassador Sowa referred to the fact that the First Lady of Sierra Leone, Her Excellency Fatima Maada Bio, recently launched a Trust Fund for survivors of trafficking. Therefore, the question was: "What are your plans in either contributing to the Trust Fund or expanding the social protection through cash transfer for all?"



Panelist Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina

In response to this question, Ambassador Ndomahina said that the National Commission for Social Action (NaCS) and its capacity as a government leading agency has established friendship and partnership with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the IOM in supporting both the organization and the Ministry for the good of the youth in Sierra Leone. The NaCS collaborates with various organizations to promote socio economic stability, reduce youth vulnerability, and contribute to the overall development of Sierra Leone. Also, partnering with entities like the World Bank and the local Ministry of Labor and Social Security, NaCS implements programs aimed at addressing "push" factors leading to rural and irregular migration, such as extreme poverty and unemployment. NaCS employs an inclusive and gender-responsive approach to enhance job creation and livelihood opportunities for youth, notably through initiatives like the Productive Social Safety Net for Youth Employment (PSSNYE). He explained that these efforts include cash transfers and economic inclusion targeting youth, particularly young women, to support their businesses and other microeconomic activities. Additionally, NaCS supports productive labor-intensive public works and life skills training for youth aged 18 to 25 in vulnerable rural and urban communities.

Moreover, the provision of Sustainable Cash for Work (SCFW) in rural areas offers employment opportunities for inactive and unemployed youth, especially females and those with disabilities, to supplement their livelihoods through environmental work opportunities. These interventions align with and support the objectives of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Panelist #3 - "Trafficking is a multi-stakeholder issue...and it requires multi-stakeholder action." -Mrs. Lerina Bright

The third and final panelist to speak was Mrs. Lerina Bright, the founder and Executive Director of Mission 89, an NGO dedicated to combating trafficking in sports through foundational pillars of research, education, and advocacy. Their approach to tackle trafficking in sports is through partnerships and collaborations, with the belief that everyone has a role to play in eradicating the problems.

Ms. Bright explained that, impressively, Sierra Leone has incorporated the issue of combatting sports trafficking into its national anti-trafficking agenda, since traffickers typically exploit athletes from marginalized backgrounds, luring them into forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other abuses, under the pretext of sports-related opportunities.

Mission 89's goals align with SDG 5 about protection of women and girls against all forms of violence and also with Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 to "eradicate forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking."

Ms. Bright underscored gender disparity issues, in that with the increase in female participation in sports, female athletes face heightened risks of sports trafficking.

Another gender-disparity related problem is that women's sports receive less visibility, media coverage, and funding compared to men's sports, leading to limited employment opportunities and financial control for female athletes. This situation in turn makes them vulnerable to being taken advantage of and seduced by traffickers.



Mrs. Lerina Bright of Mission 89

Thus, gender disparities exacerbate women's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

To address this problem, Ms. Bright said she and her organization push for comprehensive policies to be implemented to mitigate gender disparities and to safeguard female athletes. These policies, she said, should include clear guidelines, codes of conduct, and reporting mechanisms. Awareness programs, she said, should be intensified to educate athletes, coaches, and stakeholders about the risks of trafficking and exploitation in sports, while strengthening support systems to assist at-risk athletes.

Closing Remarks

In the few minutes left at the end of the event for closing remarks, Hon. Melrose Karminty challenged the audience by urging for a change in mentality about life in Sierra Leone from thinking that an individual must leave the country in order to prosper. She expressed with confidence that the country has the resources to give its residents, particularly women and girls, a meaningful life. Whilst government-led initiatives have been presented, she said, these goals can only be achieved through the cooperation and collaboration of the entire community.

Photo Gallery



(front center and right) IAAP's Dr. Judy Kuriansky and Dr. Christine Roland-Levy. (Pictured, left to right): Student members of IAAP and the GAAP Lab: Subina Arora Khaneja, Yiulin (Elaine) Peng; (back row, left to right): Jenna Wettstein, Monste Gonzalez-Alonso, Josefina Streeter, Theo Ntwari, Zeever Baqar, Emma Gaskins, Jintianyue Hwang



(Left to right): Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy, Dr. Judy Kuriansky and Hon. Melrose Karminty







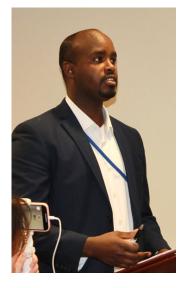


IAAP Representative Russell Daisy



Roselynn Finda Senesi, Mission of Sierra leone to the UN





Teachers College Columbia University and Dr. Kuriansky's student Theo Ntwa





Dr. Judy Kuriansky, IOM's Par Liljert, Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy



Speakers, representatives of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and of the Sierra Leone Mission to the UN, the International Association of Applied Psychology and student team members from Teachers College Columba University and Dr. Judy Kuriansky's "Psychology and the United Nations class

Personal Reflections of the first author Jenna Wettstein

Attending this event was of particular interest to me due to my focus on sexual violence in my research endeavors. I was interested in looking at this topic from a global standpoint and expanding my perspective of the issue beyond the United States. This event made me very aware of the role that gender plays in the global facilitation of the crime of trafficking and exploitation that often includes sexual violence. Learning about the gender disparities experienced by women and girls in the African country of Sierra Leone as in so many places around the world, and the dire consequences, was so infuriating to me as a woman, that I am even more inspired to use my privileged opportunities in academia to contribute to research that will help facilitate the breaking of barriers for women and girls in impoverished communities. Further, I am motivated to use my platform in clinical psychology and what I am learning in the course on "Psychology and the United Nations" to advocate for the implementation of policy reform as well as protective services that can combat the vicious cycle of violence that entraps women and girls and prevents them from prospering.

EVENT OVERVIEW:

TITLE: Bridging The Gaps: A Conversation to Empower, Raise Awareness and Inspire Collaborations

CONFERENCE: UN Commission on Status of Women (CSW68)

Date/Time: Thursday, 21 March 2024, 10:00AM-11:15AM

Location: United Nations Headquarters, New York City, Conference Room D

Moderator: H.E. Ambassador Amara Sowa, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

Statement: Mr. Par Liljert, Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Office to the United Nations in New York

Keynote Statement: Hon. Melrose Karminty,

Minister of Social Welfare, Republic of Sierra Leone

Panelists:

H.E. Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina, Commissioner, National Commission for Social Action, Mrs. Lerina Bright, Executive Director, Mission 89,

Ms. Delphine Schantz, Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Closing Remarks: Ambassador Victoria M. Sulimani, Director-General and Ambassadorat-Large, Government of Sierra Leone

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Author Bios

Jenna Wettstein is pursuing a masters' degree in the Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College, and is a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she has considerable experience in researching and working with both perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. She is committed to creating security for women and girls worldwide and providing an avenue for perpetrators to rehabilitate.

Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations.". She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs

and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Francis Kabia is the Deputy Chief Director in the Ministry of Social Welfare in Sierra Leone.

Gordon M. Tapper is the Founder and Chair of Give Them a Hand Foundation and President of the United African Congress. He served for over 35 years at the United Nations, including as Chief of Section in the Department of Administration and Management. He executive produces innumerable events at the UN, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week, working with the Mission of Sierra Leone, and for many others events, including "Africa Rise" and "Raise the Roof" promoting healthcare to remote communities; fundraising events for the Sierra Leone-Jamaica Youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, and for the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative; and for the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN).

Roselynn Finda Senesi is Deputy Secretary in the Sierra Leone Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, and has an extensive file covering many issues on behalf of the Mission, including about women and girls, and disabilities.

Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone

Yilin Peng, Charles Vandi, Judy Kuriansky, Emma Gaskins, Gordon Tapper, Roselynn Finda Senesi and Meizhu Liu

Introduction

To highlight progress, opportunities, challenges, and the way forward in consolidating gains made in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) about gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone hosted an event during the 68th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on 11 March 2024 entitled *"Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone"*.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the annual two-week long conference held at the United Nations headquarters in New York City to assess progress made in the achievement of the rights and protections of women and girls. Thousands of women and men advocates and stakeholders from all disciplines attend the conference to network and share experiences and strategies for change.

This report covers the first of five events at this year's CSW hosted by the government of the Sierra Leone highlighting what the country and their partners are doing to achieve SDG5. The actions can serve as a model for other countries.

Background

Women make up around 52% of the population in Sierra Leone, according to the 2021 Mid-term Census conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone. As such, women have significant potential to contribute actively to the development of the country; however, in the traditionally male-dominated society as in other sub-Saharan African countries, women have had unequal opportunities in society and have been unevenly represented in politics and public decision-making bodies.

This is notwithstanding the fact that generations of women's rights campaigners have raised awareness

and advocated for the minimum 30% gender parity prescribed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, among other instruments.

The passage of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act in 2022 was ground-breaking as the culmination of decades of advocacy for gender parity.

Over past years, in aiming to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, Sierra Leone became a signatory to many international and regional instruments. These include the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (aka Maputo Protocol); AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, and frameworks including Sustainable Development Goals; and the Women Peace and Security Agenda, among others.

To further promote and protect the fundamental rights of women and girls, Sierra Leone has developed sound national policies, strategies, and legislation and has made significant efforts to domesticate the above-mentioned international and regional instruments. Significantly, the government created the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy 2020 which informed the drafting of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill 2022 which was then passed by Parliament on 15 November 2022 and received presidential assent on 19 January 2023 (NDI, 2023).

The Law assures improvements in women's access to finance, employment opportunities, equal pay, maternity leave, and-critically-political representation. It also establishes a 30% quota for women's participation in government for appointed positions (including cabinet, ministry

Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone cont.

and ambassador roles) and elected positions (such as parliamentary and local council seats).

This legislation was meticulously crafted to ensure alignment and consistency with the national Constitution. Before the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill, Sierra Leone integrated gender mainstreaming into various pieces of legislation, including the Public Elections Act 2022, Customary Land Rights Act 2022, Land Commission Act 2022, Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022, and subsequently, the Political Parties Regulation Commission Act 2022.

Prior to the passage of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, the President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Julius Maada Bio, demonstrated a commitment to the empowerment of women and children by establishing the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs in November 2019. The GEWE Bill received robust endorsement from the President, and the First Lady's *"Hands Off Our Girls"* Initiative provided strong advocacy for the empowerment of women and girls in Sierra Leone.

The initiatives and progress achieved as a result of the GEWE Act are aligned with the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by contributing to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Event Overview

This event was held in person at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City in Conference Room 12 on March 11, 2024, for an hour and fifteen minutes, from 3:00 pm - 4:15 pm (EST/New York Time).

The objectives were to:

- Underscore the importance of legislation to ensure the achievement of SDG5 about gender equality and empowerment of women and girls
- Share gains made after the passage of the GEWE Act in Sierra Leone
- Explain opportunities created for Sierra Leonean women beyond the GEWE Act
- Describe challenges countries face in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women

- Highlight the way forward towards the achievement of SDG5 calling for gender equality and the empowerment of women
- Motivate and engage others in similar objectives

The main sponsor was the Government of Sierra Leone. Co-sponsors were from government, civil society and academia, including the Government of Ireland; UN Women, the UN agency mandated to promote gender equality; 50/50 Group, a organization, advocating non-partisan and campaigning for increased political participation and equal representation of women in decisionmaking processes and initiatives at all levels in Sierra Leone; the women's Forum Sierra Leone; Give Them A Hand Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that works with the UN community, NGOs and the private sector to assist less privileged communities worldwide with education and health; the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), a professional organization promoting thee science and practice of applied psychology, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social council; and the Teachers College Columbia University Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab under the leadership of Professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky, also a UN representative for IAAP and advisor for the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN. A team of GAAP lab and IAAP student members provided extensive logistic support.

The event consisted of a welcome address, two opening plenary remarks, a panel and a Q and A session, all compressed into the short time slot allotted for CSw side events.



The event room and speakers

Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone cont.



Speakers (right to left): Ambassador Amara Sowa, Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN; Ambassador Fergal Mythen of the Mission of Ireland to the UN; Deputy Minister Francess Alghali; Dr. Judy Kuriansky

This event was moderated by His Excellency Amara Sheikh Mohammed Sowa, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of The Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations who gave opening remarks.

Ambassador Sowa warmly welcomed the speakers and attendees and described the event as an overview of the efforts of Sierra Leone to achieve SDG5 through the appropriately named Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act. He expressed appreciation to the panelists who represent diverse stakeholders from government and civil society which also appropriately shows the need for partnership to achieve this important goal. He acknowledged the Government of Ireland, represented on the panel by the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission of Ireland to the UN, His Excellency Fergal Mythen, that has been an active partner on the ground in Sierra Leone and at many UN events, having shared many common historical challenges of food insecurity and conflicts, and both countries being dedicated to the advancement of women.

"Our women have been at the forefront of our democratic initiatives for peacebuilding and development for the last 20 years," he said. "In the last six years, we've made unprecedented breakthroughs, not only demonstrated through the GEWE act but also in other associated legislation."

He added that Sierra Leone has made significant progress in pushing for gender equality and women's

empowerment and this event invited distinguished panelists and women leaders who have a profound interest in Sierra Leone and have been involved in the work of women's empowerment in the country to introduce their work and progress.

Honorary remarks were delivered by two female ministers.

Honorary Remarks: Hon. Francess P. Alghali

The first Honorary Remarks were delivered by Hon. Francess P. Alghali, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Corporation of Sierra Leone.Minister Alghali has 20 years of experience and in leadership roles in management, education and human rights including serving as Executive Secretary of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and the National Human Rights Institution. Under her supervision, Sierra Leone became eligible for the Millennium Challenge Corporation Unit of the United States Compact Programme. She was a National Convenor in for the Food Systems Dialogues for Sierra Leone and Chairperson of the Multi-Stakeholder Group of the Sierra Leone Extractive Industry Initiative.

In her address, Minister Alghali introduced that the government of Sierra Leone has signed several international and regional Instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) 1995, the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (aka Maputo Protocol).

Now, she said, under the leadership of the President of Sierra Leone, His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio, who is a champion of women's rights, transformative progress has been made in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Sierra Leone.

"Under his leadership, Sierra Leone is moving from a patriarchal society to a more gender equality society," she said, making unprecedented strikes in the empowerment of women and girls.

"Currently, Sierra Leone is the leading anglophone West African country in the number of females in governance at all levels, both elective and appointed. Also, we are leading in terms of girls' school enrollment in West Africa."

Mainstreaming gender is one of the five enablers to achieving Sierra Leone's development priorities, she explained, as outlined in the new Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024 to 2030.

Minister Alghali proceeded to describe the relationship between this program and women's empowerment.As an example, a flagship program promotes agriculture techniques that increase soil fertility, diversify crop production, and encourage the cultivation of climate-resistant crop varieties, with the objective to boost agricultural productivity to achieve inclusive growth, increase access and availability of locally produced nutrients and safe food, reduce dependence on food imports, reduce hunger, increase export earnings, create jobs, and build resilient food systems.

This program is integrally tied to women's empowerment, since, as she explained,

"Women form about 52% of the population of Sierra Leone and the majority of them are found within the rural setting mainly focused on farming. It is estimated that over 60% of the food that gets to the table for consumption in Sierra Leone is produced by women."

Sierra Leone can only feed itself if the Government and development partners invest in this critical population group, she said. Therefore, empowering women will enable them to play a central role in achieving food security in Sierra Leone.

Additionally, she pointed out that the GEWE Act impacts employment opportunities for women and youth, which other panelists will further expound upon. "In the youth employment scheme, a total of 500,000 jobs are planned to be created and at least 30% of those jobs will be allotted to women as part of the implementation of the GEWE law.

Therefore, she said, "The GEWE Law is the catalyst that has enabled the government of Sierra Leone to put in place the infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls."

Honorary Remarks: Hon. Isata Mahoi

The second honorary remarks were delivered by Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone. Minister Mahoi has extensive experience and expertise in advocating for human rights, promoting gender equality, and offering strategic advice on gender-related issues such as gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. Previously, she served as the National Network Coordinator for the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone where she utilized her comprehensive knowledge of conflict resolution and social cohesion. Additionally, she has worked as a consultant for the World Bank in Sierra Leone and various UN agencies, including UNICEF, FAO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women.

In her address, Minister Mahoi reviewed Sierra Leone's efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and presented progress made so far in many areas through the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act.

"Our commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, as indicated in SDG5, is supported by strong leadership and political will. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (GEWE) is positively transforming the landscape we are in."

A few days ago, she explained, the World Bank released a report on women in business and the law which positioned Sierra Leone as one of the five countries that have progressively enacted laws that position women in gender equality.

The President of Sierra Leone recently launched the Medium-Term National Development Plan for 2024 to 2030, which has a whole section on women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming... and is fully aligned with international and regional frameworks including the UN SDGs and Agenda 2063. Also, the National Financial inclusion strategy from 2022 to 2026 has a major focus on women's financial inclusion. We are currently developing a national plan for implementation of the WPS (Women Peace and Security) Agenda," she added. Further, Sierra Leone has revised the civil service code regulations and rules as a whole chapter.

Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone cont.

Also, the Employment Act reinforces the protection of women and men in employment and the workplace, ensuring non-harassment, prohibition of discrimination, and equality in employment or occupation, for example, extending paternity leave from 12- to 14 weeks.

In terms of education, remarkable progress has been made in addressing the gender imbalance in education.

"We have seen an increase in the enrollment of girls and the retention of girls in our educational system. As a result of the radical inclusion we have brought out a strategy, which also includes women that also includes pregnant girls going back to school and being protected in a very safe place."

As poverty is entrenched, poor children cannot go to school because they have no food. Minister Mahoi explained how the school feeding program brings children together and gives them motivation to stay in school.

"The government has worked together with its partners to ensure the school feeding program works, however, there are challenges because we want, as a government, to feed every child in Sierra Leone so that we have a very good learning environment and they will be prompted to stay in school."

Encouraging progress is also being made in the health sector, especially in addressing reproductive health issues.

"The 2023 report from the United Nations maternal mortality estimation InterAgency Group showed a decreasing trend in the maternal mortality of 1,682 over 100,000 lives in comparison to 2443 over 100,000 lives in 2022. This is a phenomenal gain by the country and we have positioned ourselves to match with other economies."

Finally, she concluded, "The monumental increase in the number of women in appointive and elective positions is a huge step in the right direction. Political leadership and commitment in moving gender equality and women's empowerment is more than ever before."

Video

A video was shown of a television interview of His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio about the serious commitment of the government to women's advancement and closing the gender gap, of which the GEWE Act in a part. Significantly, women must hold 30% of positions at all levels of government.

He noted that he had declared a national emergency on rape, and tightened the laws on sexual and gender-based violence, with special courts to process cases quickly.

Free education has made a significant difference, with the impressive result that girls have applied to study engineering.

He acknowledged the impressive efforts of the First Lady, evident in her *"Hands Off Our Girls"* campaign against early marriage and all forms of violence, ensuring women's menstrual health and many aspects of empowerment of girls.

Women are "seriously considered equal partners in development," he said, "to prepare Sierra Leone for the development it needs so that our people can be part of the 21st century, which means you have to unleash the power of women, and to unleash the power of women, you have to unleash the generation of the power of girls."

Details of the GEWE Act

Then, Mr. Charles Vandi, Director of Gender Affairs of the Government of Sierra Leone's Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs presented a more detailed outline of the Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act by introducing its background, purpose, and objective, key provisions, key milestones and achievements, and future directions. The GEWE act ensures advancement of women in several areas of focus.

Public Elections and Appointment to Public Offices:

- Public Elections shall be in accordance with section 58(2) of the Public Elections Act 2022:
 " for every 3 candidates submitted for public elections at least 1 shall be female"
- In making appointments to cabinet and other

Beyond the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone cont.

government positions, the President may take due consideration to the possibility of appointing at least 30% of women.

 All non-Presidential appointments in the public offices shall ensure at least 30% percent of women.

In a significant step towards fulfilling the call for women's inclusion in decision-making, Sierra Leone conducted a national multi tier election on 24 June 2023. This election led to a substantial increase in the representation of women in elective positions, such as Parliamentary and Local Council seats, as well as in appointive roles, including Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and other senior government positions.

Formidable changes in the increased representation and proportion of women in elective and appointed political positions before and after the enactment of the GEWE Act, include that cabinet ministers increased from 15% to 34.5%; members of Parliaments more than doubled from 13% to 28%; and Mayors and Chairpersons of local councils tripled from 14% to 41%.

Equality in Employment:

- Public or private employers, including NGOs (with a minimum 30 employees) shall have a minimum of 30% of women in its employment. There must be a minimum of 30% of women in decision making positions within an organization.
- Discrimination is prohibited in employment based on gender as is dismissal as a result of pregnancy.
- Sexual harassment is prohibited in workplaces, with associated civil remedies
- Paid maternity leave for women in ensured of at least 14 weeks to women
- Equal remuneration and treatment for employees with equal skills and competence is ensured.
- Equal opportunity is ensured for male and female employees in relation to training, education and scholarship.

Access to Finance:

- Equal access and rights to credit and financial services, transactions and products.
- The Bank of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Finance shall prescribe procedures and processes for improving access to finance for women.
- Non- discrimination based on gender or any other grounds in the provision and access to financial services or resources with stiff penalties for defaulters: imprisonment for a term not less than 3 years or to both such fine and imprisonment for individual and not less than 100,000.00 New Leones.

Gender Mainstreaming (including Gender Responsive Budgeting):

- Every Ministry, Department, Agency and other public service Institution shall have a Gender Unit within its Planning Directorate which shall be responsible to: integrate gender demands into sectoral legal framework, policies, strategies and action plan; and collect and analyze gender disaggregated data and present in a report to the relevant Ministry, Department, Agency or other public service institution
- The Ministry of Finance shall facilitate fiscal and administrative policies for national gender budgeting.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting:

- Establishment of Gender Steering Committee responsible for:Monitoring and evaluation of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and other public service institutions for compliance with this Act.
- Annual gender auditing of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and other public service institutions and submit a report of their findings and recommendations to the Minister to be laid in Parliament. The report of the Committee shall include factors and challenges affecting the implementation of this Act including recommendations.
- Undertake a mid-term review of the implementation of the Act.

Mr.Vandioutlinedkeymilestones and achievements in strengthening gender mainstreaming in Ministries, Department and Agencies (MDAs) (AYVA News, 2023). These include:

- Established Gender Units in 28 Ministries
- Capacity-building training for MDAs Gender
 Units
- Recruited consultants for coordination and technical support to MDAs
- Gender Units with support from the World
 Bank
- UN Women provided technical support for the development of the GEWE
- Accountability framework
- Developing regulations for implementation of the GEWE Act
- Received funding from the World Bank to support 3 Ministries in developing policies and regulations that align with the GEWE Act.



Charles Vandi explaining the GEWE Act, with Emma Gaskins managing tech/logistics

Panel

Panelist: H.E. Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

His Excellency Fergal Mythen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Mission of Ireland to the United Nations since 2022, notably previously led the team working for the government of Ireland on the Northern Ireland peace process and implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. At the UN, he has been a staunch supporter of women's issues. "It's a real pleasure to be here at my second CSW, and it's my favorite time of the year to be at the UN when the walls fall, the doors are opened and people come from across the world, activists, campaigners and politicians. It is an energizing time in a really important way, not just in bravery but in the challenging activist way (with) the voice of demand and change."

Ambassador Mythen said he was very inspired by the progress of Sierra Leone, and that the women's rights process in Sierra Leone was like a reflection of Ireland's history. He compared the differences between his mother's and daughter's eras and talked about how Irish women had been treated unequally in the past, such as having to leave their jobs after marriage and not being able to have private bank accounts. He said that over 60 years, from 1919 to 1976, there were no female ministers in the Irish government.

That's why we're so impressed with the progress of Sierra Leone, he said, which we identify with in our own history in Ireland. "We see your journey in similar terms and we're really inspired by it, and we work in partnership and we walk with you. We know it's a process, we know it's never over. We know it's not easy to change." That's why, he said, "We're really inspired with the figures you report."

Ambassador Mythen also shared the challenges faced by Ireland. In the Irish Parliament, just less than a quarter of the members are women (22.6%) and only a quarter of the Ministers are women. So, there is still a long journey.

"I think one thing we've learned in Ireland is that government officials are brilliant and knowledgeable, but we don't have all the answers." He added, "You have to work in partnership with civil society, communities, and local leaders. It has to follow the UN word 'multi-stakeholder'. What does that mean? It means ensuring all the voices are at the table."

He affirmed that Ireland and Sierra Leone are mutual partners and in whatever way Ireland could support the process of women's equality and empowerment in Sierra Leone, Ireland would do it in full partnership.

"It's exactly as your President said: it's not just the right thing to do in terms of gender equality, it's a sensible thing to do, it's a smart thing to do. You know, in Ireland, our economic journey was very difficult after independence for a whole variety of reasons but our economic journey and development really took off (and) our social journey is bringing everybody into the workforce, empowering men and women, boys and girls. So, it's a smart thing to do. It's the economic thing to do as well as the social one. It just makes sense on so many levels and I was really encouraged about what your President has said."

Emphasizing his vision of working together with Sierra Leone, he said,

"We struggle and we push back, and sometimes mistakes are made. We keep on going and as you keep on going, we will walk with you every step of the way as we hope you will walk with us every step of our way. Never let's be despondent. Despair despondency is not a policy. Hope and activism and legislation and action are policies that we can work together around."

Ambassador Sowa thanked Ambassador Mythen and noted progress from his youth that when he was in school, there was only one female cabinet minister, and in 2004, when he entered the local government system, there was only one mayor and one female local council chairperson. But now the numbers are dramatically higher, showing what Sierra Leone has achieved today, demonstrating a collective will to improve gender equality.

Panelist: Ms. Sally Adams, President, Women's Forum of Sierra Leone

Ms. Sally Adams is President of the Women's Forum in Sierra Leone, a network of women's NGOs and key partner with the government on behalf of actions for women and girls in Sierra Leone, to enhance women's social, political, and economic power. She discussed contributions made by the GEWE Act and stressed the importance of raising awareness among women, especially in rural areas, about the benefits of the Act. For example, the Bill expanded maternity leave for women from 12 to 14 weeks. Also, the Land Act was passed so that, significantly, women are able to own land on their own.

"The GEWE Act has so many benefits and we also have challenges because our women in the rural areas don't know exactly what is in the Bill."

Women's groups such as the one she represents had been eager for the passage of the GEWE Act, and today, they have seen its benefits, she concluded.

Panelist: Professor Fredline M'Cormack-Hale, President of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, and Professor, School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University



Professor Fredline M'Cormack-Hale is President of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone which promotes gender parity through training and advocacy. Also, as Associate Professor in the School of Diplomacy and International Relations at Seton Hall University, she teaches courses on international economics, African affairs, and post-conflict state reconstruction. A former Fulbright scholar, she is also a member of the International Experts Panel, serves as Research and Policy Director for the Institute for Governance Reform in Sierra Leone, and is a recognized authority on health issues in West Africa. Health M'Cormack-Hale, 2018).

In her address, she pointed out that the joint efforts of partners, civil society NGOs, and international and national organizations can indeed bring about substantial changes, especially in the implementation and monitoring of GEWE, where

civil society organizations can also play a key role. Therefore, she briefly introduced three main areas:

- 1) Assess and addressing the binding constraints to implement in GEW
 - a. Free education has gone a long way in addressing some of these issues, but women are still lagging in higher education, with only 7% of women versus 20% of men having access to higher education. Women are more likely to have no formal education, and they are less likely to have assets like radios, mobile phones, and bank accounts. One of the things that GEWE has given women such great opportunities is that at least 30% of women are in leadership positions, but if women are potentially lagging behind in education, then that means we have to make sure there is good quality, targeted training so that women can get into those positions.
 - b. For women to be elected, women in parliament need to be trained. 50/50 and other organizations funds, by Irish Aid funded, by UN Women, Christian Aid has trained and mentored women pre and postelections, trained them in campaigning in public speaking, in writing and passing bills and that process doesn't end with them getting into government, but working alongside them to ensure that when they get into government, they can looking at this from a gender transformative perspective. Sexual harassment training in the workplace is also needed, and, given that more women are working there now.
- 2) Complement state and donor GEWE partner channels monitor to GEWE has another transformative component. which is increasing women's access to finance, but there are some binding constraints as well. One of the issues is that women have less access to bank accounts than men. So how to get more women access to bank accounts is something that needs to be explored. Sierra Leone Bank has done some great work in implementing less stringent eligibility criteria for women so that women can get loans. Prof. Fredline M'Cormack-

Hale suggested that civil society organizations can talk about it, publicize this, let women know that these less stringent criteria exist so that they can apply, and also try to get other organizations and other banking institutions involved.

- 3) Leverage policy and legal reform processes that align with GEWE.
 - a. The constitutional review process has been restarted in Sierra Leone. Women can advocate for this inequality to be removed and a 30% gender equality system has been enshrined in the constitution.
 - b. The rules and regulations need to be in a zipper system. Currently, it is 30% but moving towards 50%. The zipper system represents one man one woman one man one woman and this allows for gender equality that will not stop.

Then, Honorable Chernoh Bah, Minister Of Information and Civic Education for the Republic of Sierra Leone was called on to offer a comment. Bah is an advocate for girl's and women's education and co-founder of A World At School and Purposeful.

Minister Bah began by saying that Sierra Leone as a country represents an example of political leadership in addressing equal rights for women.

"What we have seen and demonstrated here today, is beyond words. We have seen real action," he said. "I come from the feminist activist world, and what you first want to see is a clear demonstrable political commitment. We have that at the highest level."

Minister Bah proposed to "follow the money" and see where the resources are to determine the priorities. These are in women's health and education.

He added "I have a minister of Health. Here, they can talk a lot about the gains we've made. For example in reduction in met mortality in our country, we did not have about that enough here. She just led a big effort to say we're going to make progress in child mortality."



Hon. Chernoh Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education for the Republic of Sierra Leone

Furthermore, he stressed that Sierra Leone is a champion of education, "We listen to His Excellency the president make a commitment on our determination to ensure that any female who is studying STEM doesn't pay a single cent from the first day of school until the day she graduates."

Finally, he concluded that Sierra Leone has commitment, action, and resources, which is a country worthy of cooperation and alliance.

Q & A Session

Questions in the Q and A session spurred discussion about next step efforts to promote knowledge about the Sierra Leone successes mentioned in the session, including the *Hands Off Our Girls* campaign, and advancing the first-ever resolution about widows championed by Sierra Leone with the Global Fund for Widows.

A question from Clara Park, team leader of the Gender team in the Food and Agriculture Organization at the United Nations, addressed the important issue of land rights. She said, "First of all, I want to commend the government and the people of Sierra Leone for the amazing progress that we heard about. As FAO, we are also very proud to have walked along the government in promoting especially equitable governance of land tenures and specifically focusing on women's access to land. You have amazing legislation now in place, very progressive, but one of the hurdles at the moment is the customary laws and customary practices that actually get in the way of women's access to land." Sierra Leone has actually made tremendous strides in this area – interestingly with assistance of Trocaire, an Irish development agency – to pass laws in 2022 to allow women the same rights as men to own or buy land.

Closing Remarks

Closing remarks were given by Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor to the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Stations, IAAP UN representative, and a Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. With a long history of familiarity and service to the country, she confirmed the impressive progress reported at this meeting; acknowledged Ireland's partnership and their commitment to women, modestly noted by Ambassador Mythen given that about half of the representatives in missions of Ireland are women; and recognized the support of men, an important theme throughout the Commissions on the Status of Women.



Photos were taken after the meeting.



Student team Emma Langsford, Akniyet Ozat, Emily McGill, Josefina Streeter, Zeever Baqar, Dilara Ozbutun and Emma Gaskins, with Dr. Judy Kuriansky (center)

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Author bios

Yilin (Elaine) Peng, a research assistant of the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, and a member of the International Association of Applied Psychology Division of Students and Early Career Professionals, who is pursuing a Master's degree in the Department of Clinical Psychology at Columbia University Teachers College and is currently studying in Professor Judy Kuriansky's course on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition to her scholastic work, she has experience working in teenager suicide prevention programs, and nonprofit organizations for exceptional children. She is interested in education and mental health and well-being among adolescents and children globally.

Charles Vandi is the Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone in Freetown, where he has served for the past 20 years.

Judy Kuriansky, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College Columbia University on the adjunct faculty for 20+ years, including teaching the course on "Psychology and the United Nations.". She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. She has a long history of service to the country of Sierra Leone including providing psychosocial support programs and was conferred the honor of being awarded as a Grand Commander of the Order of the Rokel by His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio. For 20+ years she has headed UN representation of NGOs, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy, with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Her many professional journal articles and books are on topics of international issues, including disaster recovery, epidemics, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East, the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and Innovative Technology in Resilient Health, as well as on interpersonal healthy relationships. A trauma expert, she has provided psychosocial support in disasters worldwide, including

China, Japan, Haiti, Sri Lanka and Iran. At the UN, she was instrumental in the inclusion of mental health and wellbeing in the UN 2030 Agenda and other international instruments. Also an advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about the SDGs and SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Emma Gaskins, M.A. graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University Masters Program in Developmental Psychology with a background in educational and developmental psychology research. Previously, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina, earning a B.A. in psychology and a minor in English. Currently, she serves as the Co-Manager of Teachers College, Columbia University's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, actively contributing to advocacy initiatives for the advancement of youth mental health and well-being. These initiatives involve collaboration with ambassadors and delegates from United Nations mission offices, emphasizing the practical application of psychology in addressing global challenges. Her academic and professional interests seek to advance the development of youth, through educational settings, psychosocial interventions, or youth development programs. Her studies and research have focused on facilitating holistic, social-emotional approaches to learning and implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs, addressing multifaceted challenges faced by youth globally. Her goals are to implement programming which empowers young people to reach their full potential by encouraging positive growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

Gordon M. Tapper is the Founder and Chair of Give Them a Hand Foundation and President of the United

African Congress. He served for over 35 years at the United Nations, including as Chief of Section in the Department of Administration and Management. He executive produces innumerable events at the UN, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week, working with the Mission of Sierra Leone, and for many others events, including "Africa Rise" and "Raise the Roof" promoting healthcare to remote communities; fundraising events for the Sierra Leone-Jamaica Youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, and for the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative; and for the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN).

Roselynn Finda Senesi is Deputy Secretary in the Sierra Leone Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, and has an extensive file covering many issues on behalf of the Mission, including about women and girls, and disabilities.

Meizhu Liu is a graduate student at Teachers College Columbia University. She has been an English teacher for seven years and previously was a technology assistant for IBM in Shenzhen, China.

Mainstreaming Gender in the Big Five Game Changers in Sierra Leone: Event at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Delaney Simchuk, Judy Kuriansky, Charles Vandi, Gordon Tapper and Roselynn Finda Sensei

Introduction

The "Big Five" is a popular term in different realms. The "Big Five personality traits" refer to five broad dimensions of characteristics, and the "Big Five" are also game animals on African safaris. But the term is now also enshrined in a government context, with the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio declaring the Big Five Game Changer National Priorities for the overall sustainable economic growth and development of the nation of Sierra Leone.

These are outlined in President Bio's manifesto entitled *"The New Direction: Consolidating the Gains and Accelerating Transformation,"* launched in 2023 (Maada Bio, 2023). The "Big Five Game Changers" detail the areas to achieve national progress for the country.

Notably, issues of gender equality, protection of women's rights, and ensuring women's empowerment are integrated into these Big Five Game Changers and the Medium-Term National Development Plan.

The process of mainstreaming gender into the government framework was the topic of an event appropriately presented at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference since CSW is the platform for thousands of women and men from around the world to gather at the UN headquarters in New York City to discuss issues of the rights and protection of women and girls.

Such mainstreaming throughout government can serve as a model for other countries.

These gender rights are enshrined in the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development,

specifically in Sustainable Development Goal 5 which calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The CSW conference is an annual two-week long conference in March at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, organized by UN WOMEN, the UN agency mandated to address and insure the rights, protections, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, in alignment with SDG5 of the UN 2030 Agenda (UN WOMEN, 2024a, 2024b).

This event was held at the UN headquarters in New York City on March 19, 2024 from 3:00-4:15PM EST, in Conference Room C. This report presents an overview of that event and background on the issues.

Background

The Republic of Sierra Leone is signatory to many International and Regional Instruments aimed at promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls indicated in SDG 5 of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. These include the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN, 1995; UN WOMEN, 2015); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol); the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality; and frameworks including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Women Peace and Security.

Sierra Leone has made significant strides in domesticating these International and Regional Instruments through adoption of sound national policies, strategies and legislation to promote and protect the fundamental rights of women and girls.

For example, Sierra Leone developed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy 2020 which informed the drafting of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill 2022 (Ighobor, 2023). The GEWE Bill passed in Parliament on 15 November 2022. Even prior to the passage of the GEWE Bill into law, Sierra Leone ensured that gender was mainstreamed in a number of legislations, including the Public Elections Act 2022; Customary Land Rights Act 2022; Land Commission Act 2022; Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022, and later, the Political Parties Regulation Commission Act 2022.

In a major step indicating the inclusion of women in decision-making as called for in the UN 2030 Agenda and specifically SDG5, Sierra Leone held a national multi tier election on 24 June 2023 with the outcome witnessing a momentous increase in the number of women in elective positions, including to Parliamentary and local councils, and a similar increase in appointive positions including as Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other senior government positions.

In another major step supporting SDG5, The Sierra Leone Government's Urban Research Center (2019) developed and implemented the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019 – 2023) (MTNDP) which mainstreamed gender in all clusters and set aside an entire cluster #5 on "Empowering Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities". The implementation of this MTNDP led to gains made in the development of GEWE Policy 2020, GEWE Act 2022, and the Women's Economic Empowerment Fund for female entrepreneurs.

Call to Action for Accelerating the Achievement of Gender Equality

While it had been reported that in Sierra Leone, women's "voice, visibility, participation, and representation in elective and appointment positions remain very low compared to men" (USAID, n.d.), the First Lady of Sierra Leone H.E. Mrs. Fatima Maada Bio has stated that Sierra Leone is now a model country in Africa for gender equality due to considerable progress both politically and socially in improving the rights and protection of women (Sambira, 2023). In February of 2019, President Bio declared rape and sexual violence a national emergency in Sierra Leone. Later that year, new legislation set a 15year minimum sentence for rape compared to the previous 15 years maximum sentence for sex crimes (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Both President Bio and H.E. Mrs. Fatima Maada Bio are key champions of gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2019 at the United Nations General Assembly, the First Lady and the President launched the *#HandsOffOurGirls* campaign to "protect girls from rape and early marriage...a form of legalized rape, as it often occurs without the consent of the girls involved" (Sambira, 2023). Notably, the First Lady herself was nearly forced into marriage at age 10 but escaped, using this experience as motivation for championing women's issues.

The Big Five Game Changers

The Big 5 Game Changers are:

- **Big 5.1** *Feed Salone*, aimed at boosting agricultural productivity to ensure food security, inclusive economic growth and social stability
- **Big 5.2** *Human Capital Development*, focuses on delivering inclusive skills and a healthy population for the 21st century demands through scaled-up investment in human capital development
- **Big 5.3** Youth Employment Scheme, serves as a catalyst for democratic sustainability, economic productivity and national security aimed at supplying 500,000 jobs for youths in the next five to seven years
- **Big 5.4** *Technology and Infrastructure*, focuses on increasing investment in infrastructure, technology and digitalization
- **Big 5.5** *Transforming the Public Service Architecture,* with a view to ensuring efficiency and professionalism in the public sector in order to achieve effective service delivery and maximized development results



Background of the Big Five Game Changers

Event Objectives

The overall goal of the event was to show how gender is mainstreamed in this government's development plan. The specific objectives were to:

- Share the Big Five Game Changers in Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan
- Showcase how gender is mainstreamed in the Medium-Term National Development Plan
- Explain how the Medium-Term National Development Plan and the Big Five Game Changers are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and specifically with SDG5
- Describe practical experience in mainstreaming gender in sectoral development plans, policies and legislations
- Share measures put in place by Sierra Leone towards meeting UN Agenda 2030 and specifically SDG5
- Solidify Sierra Leone's commitment to the advancement of the rights of women
- Invite partnerships in these efforts

Co-sponsors

Joining the main sponsor of the Government of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs were The Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations, UN Women, the International Association of Applied Psychology, Give Them A Hand Foundation and the Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab at Teachers College Columbia University.

The Event

The event consisted of three parts: an opening statement, a main presentation, and a moderated panel discussion where panelists responded to specific questions posed to them individually, and closing remarks.

The moderator of the event was His Excellency Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Amara Sowa, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative (DPR) of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations.

Ambassador Sowa began by discussing successful development programs in Sierra Leone, including the Free Quality School Education Program, which ensures that education costs for young people are covered by the Government of Sierra Leone. He stated that President Maada Bio has used this strong foundation to create the development project, the "Big Five Game Changers" and that the event discussion would address "how gender takes its place in Sierra Leone's development agenda."

The event would consist of an opening address, main presentation, panelists who would respond to specific questions, and closing remarks.



Panelists (left to right): Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, H.E. Ambassador Amara Sowa, Hon. Isata Mahoi, Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally

Ambassador Sowa introduced the speakers and panelists:

- Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs
- H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Permanent Representative, Mission of Ireland to

the United Nations

- Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Informationand Civic Education, Sierra Leone
- Ms. M'balu A. Kamara, Deputy Director, Rural Development in the Ministry of Planning & Economic Development, Sierra Leone
- Hon. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Sierra Leone
- Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Sierra Leone
- Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of Parliament, Sierra Leone
- Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mongbo, Head of Office, UN Women, Sierra Leone
- Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator, Youth Association in Sierra Leone
- Mr. Gordon Tapper, President, United African Congress and Founder, Give Them A Hand Foundation



(left to right): H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Department Representative, Mission of Ireland to the United Nations; Mr. Gordon Tapper, President, United African Congress; Founder, Give Them A Hand Foundation; Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator, Youth Association in Sierra Leone; Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mbongbo, Head of Office, UN Women; Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs; Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security; and Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of Parliament

He also acknowledged guests Hon. Mrs. Melrose Karminty, Minister of Social Welfare, Sierra Leone; Madam Baindu Dassama-Kamara, former Minister of Social Welfare, Sierra Leone; Ambassador Victoria Mangay Sulimani, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Sierra Leone; and Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, representative of a co-sponsor, the International Association of Applied Psychology, and head of another co-sponsor, the Columbia University Teachers College Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab.



Dr. Judy Kuriansky

Ambassador Sowa then invited the Honorable Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Sierra Leone to make an opening statement.

Opening Statement

Hon. Isata Mahoi welcomed the attendees to the event on behalf of the government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and the national women's mission in Sierra Leone, and expressed her gratitude for being able to discuss how Sierra Leone's national development is connected to the Big Five Game Changers, and to share Sierra Leone's experience in integrating a gender perspective within this national development framework.

Minister Mahoi explained that Sierra Leone's commitment to women's empowerment stems from the "backdrop and realization that women constitute over 51% of Sierra Leone's population, and so sustainable development and economic growth cannot be obtained without addressing the practical strategic interests of women."



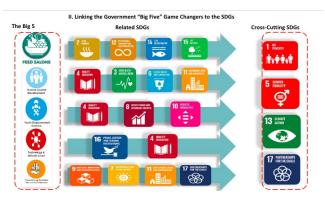
Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs

Further, she stated that Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) of 2023 launched by President Bio reflects and aligns with a commitment to the country's gender equality standard as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This plan builds on the successful implementation of the MTNDP of 2019, in which Cluster 5.1 defines the following key targets to be achieved by the year 2023. These are to:

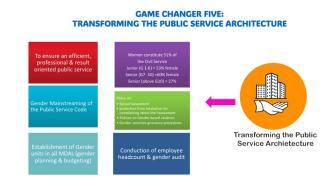
- Ensure that there are more women in leadership positions in government than in 2018.
- Ensure that more women are supported to engage in entrepreneurial activities than in 2018.
- Develop and implement a national data and information management system on genderbased violence cases.
- Drastically reduce, by more than 50%, percent the number of women experiencing genderbased violence (GBV), compared to the year 2018.

To explain one of the event objectives – to show how the Big Five Game Changers are related to the Sustainable Development Goals – Minster Mahoi showed a slide clearly depicting the connections. The illustration also showed that SDG5 about gender equality –as well as eradicating poverty, taking climate action, and forming partnerships – is a cross-cutting issue that applies across the board.

Minister Mahoi then detailed the concrete results from the implementation of the Medium-Term National Development Plan of 2019, successfully fulfilling these key targets, including the Gender Equality and Women's Empower (GEWE) Act of 2022. Credit is due to this act, for increased participation and representation of women in the political and public offices of Sierra Leone.



Graphic depicting how the SDGs factor into the Big Five Game Changers



The fifth game changer which addresses commitment to ensuring gender equality in public service

An example of such progress is that in Sierra Leone's last Parliament there were 18 women compared to the current Parliament where there are 42 women. "This is what we care to fight for, this is what we're looking forward to, to get a considerable amount of women in the political space," Minister Mahoi asserted.

Credit goes to President Maada Bio, seh said, forh proactively appointing women in leadership positions and increasing the number of women in Sierra Leone's political sphere.

The GEWE Act ensures other advances for women, including: that women cannot be denied bank loans because of their gender; equal pay for women for the same work as men; and equal training and scholarship opportunities for women (Ngila, 2023).

Another result from the implementation of the development plan was strengthening the prevention of, and response to, gender-based violence (GBV). This was thanks to the National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone, launched by President Bio in 2020. This strategy is exceptionally progressive as it recognizes men and boys as "part of the solution," and works with them "to change attitudes, end harmful practices and support sexual and reproductive health and GBV services" (UNFPA, 2020).

In the context of Sierra Leone's significant progress in support of the empowerment of women, Minister Mahoi said that more can be done to improve the status of women. She asserted that she and her Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs will keep contributing to the mainstreaming of gender issues in Sierra Leone, noting that "The Five Big Game Changers presents an opportunity to improve women's status. However, its successful implementation depends on how effectively we are able to maintain gender across the Five Game Changers."

Presentation

Ambassador Sowa thanked Minister Mahoi and introduced Ms. M'balu A. Kamara, Deputy Director of Rural Development in the Ministry of Planning & Economic Development in Sierra Leone, to make a presentation about the Game Changers and gender mainstreaming.

Ms. Kamara gave an overview of Sierra Leone's Big Five Changers, which was started with the launch of "A transformative acceleration agenda for Food Security, Human Capital Development and Job Creation" held on January 30, 2024.

While Sierra Leone's previous medium-term development plans spanned over five years, the current plan will span for seven years. Created

with much intentionality and thoughtfulness, this current plan into consideration lessons learned from previous plans and extensive consultations with participatory stakeholders. President Bio has called the plan a "well-thought-out national development plan" to make sure the needs of Sierra Leoneans were "meticulously addressed" (Sierra Leone State House, 2024).

To show the Game Changers clearly, Ms. Kamara displayed a conceptual framework of the Big Five Game Changers pictured as a pyramid. The goal of feeding Sierra Leone, as Game Changer 1, is at the center inside the pyramid. The entire pyramid rests on Game Changer 5, "Transforming the Public Service Architecture," because "an efficient, professional, and result-oriented public service" is necessary to "accelerate the execution of the Game Changers."



The Big 5 Game Changers conceptualized as a pyramid

Five "enablers" serve as "the supporting pillars that will create the necessary environment for the implementation of the game changers." These are shown in the figure. Ms. Kamara specifically pointed out Enabler 4, "mainstreaming gender," which depends on the implementation of the GEWE Act and ensures that policies at the national level are done with this agenda in mind.

Diving deeper into the Big Five Game Changers, Ms. Kamara detailed how gender is mainstreamed into each one.

Regarding the implementation of Game Changer 1, "Feeding Salone" (which refers to Sierra Leone), she explained that there are six strategic pillars to

implement this Game Changer that involve women. For example, one pillar is to support women and youths in cultivating high value cash crops.



Ms. M'balu A. Kamara Deputy Director, Rural Development; Ministry of Planning & Economic Development

Game Changer 2, "Human Capital Development," relies on the successful achievement of women's empowerment. The pillars of this Game Changer are based on broadly improving women's health, lives, and safety. This includes reducing adolescent pregnancy, increasing women's access to finance, and increasing social protection benefits for PWDs (persons with disabilities).

Game Changer 3, the "Youth Employment Scheme" aims to create 500,000 jobs which will be created by multiple sectors of Sierra Leone's economy, such as agriculture and tourism. Out of these anticipated 500,000 jobs, Sierra Leone is ensuring that at least 30% are given to women.

In Game Changer 4, "Technology, Innovation, and Infrastructure," gender is easily mainstreamed, since the focus of technological improvement is on rural areas in which women are the majority of the population.

Finally, for Game Changer 5, "Transforming the Public Service Architecture," identifies how the civil service code has been adjusted so that women can begin to constitute a higher proportion of the civil service than in the past. Overall, Ms. Kamara pointed out, it is clear from the conception of the pyramid and the list of enablers, that Sierra Leone's Game Changers are closely aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by the year 2030.

Ms. Kamara ended her presentation by declaring, "We the women of Sierra Leone and we the people of Sierra Leone, we are changing the game."



Ms. M'balu A. Kamara, Deputy Director, Rural Development; Ministry of Planning & Economic Development, showing the presentation's final slide

Moderated Panel Session

After this presentation, the moderator thanked Ms. Kamara and introduced the panel. The panel consisted of seven members:

- H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Permanent Representative, Mission of Ireland to the United Nations
- Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education
- Hon. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development
- Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security
- Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of Parliament
- Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mongbo, Head of Office, UN Women
- Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator, Youth Association in Sierra Leone.

Each panelist was posed a question by event moderator Ambassador Sowa.

Panelist 1:

The first panelist was Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education, Sierra Leone. The question posed to Minister Bah was:

> "As the Minister in charge of rolling out and communicating government's policies, programmes and initiatives, what strategies has your Ministry put in place to keep the local and international public aware of progress made in implementing the 5 Big Changers?"

In response, Minster Bah enumerated the great success and progress Sierra Leone has made in recent years. "All of these changes did not happen overnight," he noted, crediting "the efforts of generations of women leaders and civil society activists in our country." Minster Bah noted that it was formerly widely considered that being born a woman in Sierra Leone was a disadvantage but in stark contrast, today, the country of Sierra Leone is an incredible example of gender empowerment. Minister Bah also credited President Julius Maada Bio for enabling this progress, explaining that President Maada Bio is someone who "believes in these things, who has done all these reforms that we're talking about, who champions women's empowerment, and who's not just a talker, who's a doer." Minister Bah expressed his pride in his country's growth and his firm belief that Sierra Leone will continue to make progress and be a model for women's empowerment.

Panelist 2:

Following Minister Bah's remarks, the moderator turned to the Hon. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development in Sierra Leone, to ask if he foresees any funding challenges for Sierra Leone, due to the funding challenges of the previous Medium-Term National Plan. The question posed was: "The Medium-Term National Development Plan defines the government's priorities for sustainable development and economic growth for the next six years. Given the experience of the previous Medium Term National Plan vis-a-vis funding challenges, do you envision any funding challenges?"



Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education

Mr. Williams responded that the funding challenges of the previous development plan were due in large part to the many global crises since 2020. He expressed his belief that Sierra Leone can draw from the experiences and lessons learned from the previous development plan and create innovative financing schemes to close the current financing gap. However, he acknowledged that funding challenges always exist, and they particularly impact developing nations like Sierra Leone, which makes partnerships between the government and their partners key, including partnerships with the private sector.

The following policy measures will be taken:

- 1. Rebranding Sierra Leone as a destination for investment
- 2. Implementing the Sierra Leone Sustainable Blue economic strategy
- 3. Strengthening the mechanism to access climate finance for the implementation of climate change interventions
- 4. Supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement
- 5. Rationalizing the public investment program
- 6. Strengthening external relations and economic diplomacy

Panelist 3:

The next panelist, Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, was introduced by the moderator. The moderator posed to Mrs. Tenneh Dick the following question:

"Feed Salone is one of the 5 Big Changers in the Medium-Term National Development. As the coordinating Ministry for the Feed Salone Initiative, why the focus on Feed Salone and what impact will Feed Salone have on women's empowerment?"

Minister Dick began by saying, "This is our time. I'm a woman speaking here on agriculture, but I'm a woman in the field of gender, so when it comes to agriculture, I always want women to stand tall." Referring to global challenges, such as the Ukraine-Russia war, she explained that Sierra Leone has faced incredible adversity in the agricultural economy. This is the reason "Feed Sierra Leone" is primary in the goals of the Big Five Game Changers. To accomplish this goal, Minister Dick explained that her Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security is looking at sustainable approaches to field production and restoration.

In all efforts, she said, Sierra Leone's agriculture must be adaptive to the adverse effects of climate change.

Minister Dick then emphasized the importance of the agricultural economy, noting that "Agriculture is our livelihood in Sierra Leone, involving both our cultural heritage and the foundation of our national prosperity." Supporting this claim is the fact that agriculture employs the most Sierra Leoneans of any sector and contributes 45% of the country's GDP.



Gender mainstreaming in Game Changer 1, "Feed Salone"

Regrettably, she said, women in Sierra Leone are currently less likely than men to own or operate land. To address this problem, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security is formulating a policy that will place women in the forefront of the agriculture sector.

Panelist 4:

The moderator next turned to panelist Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of the Republic to Sierra Leone Parliament, asking her how Parliament will ensure adequate financing for gender equality and women's empowerment. The question was:

> "Given the challenge of low budgetary allocation to national gender machineries, how will Parliament ensure adequate financing for gender equality and women's empowerment priorities in the Medium-Term National Development Plan?"

Mrs. Tarawally answered by first explaining three acts passed by Parliament: the GEWE Act of 2022, the Customary Land Right Act of 2022, and the National Land Commission Act of 2022. She reported that she had assured the ministers that Parliament "will see into it that as we move forward to the next budget, we will budget and prioritize our gender issues in all of the budgets in all of our ministries." In her role as the Gender Chair of Parliament, Mrs. Tarawally explained how important mainstreaming gender is to her, and that she plans to champion a standalone budget for gender issues.



Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of the Sierra Leone Parliament

Panelist 5:

Next, the moderator addressed a question to H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Permanent Representative (DPR) of the Mission of Ireland to the United Nations. The question was:

> "What would you like to share in terms of the Republic of Ireland's support to the implementation of the gender Equality and Women's empowerment priorities in the Medium-Term National Development Plan?"

Ambassador Cronin began by commending the government of Sierra Leone "on behalf of the government of Ireland, for the progress that you are making in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment particularly through the enactment of legislation and through the plans that you have made and that you are implementing."

He then explained that Ireland had started a development program in Sierra Leone in 2005 which offers support for gender equality and women's empowerment programs in Sierra Leone (Irish Aid, n.d.). He offered assurances that Ireland will continue to support the gender mission of Sierra Leone and explained Ireland's passion for supporting Sierra Leone's gender empowerment initiatives as stemming from Ireland's own history with gender inequality.

Ireland's specific interest in "Feed Salone" – the first of the Big 5 Game Changers of Sierra Leone's development plan is also based on common ground between the two countries, in that Ireland has a well-known history of tragic past famine. Thus, he explained, both Ireland and Sierra Leone can learn from each other in developing food security.

Ambassador Cronin concluded his statement by expressing that the Republic of Ireland is very happy to be a part of Sierra Leone's story of hope and transformation: "We are with you now as you are welcoming this very ambitious and very welcome agenda."

Panelist 6:

The next panelist to speak was Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mbongbo, Head of the Office of UN Women

in Sierra Leone. The moderator asked her how UN Women will support the government of Sierra Leone in ensuring the mainstreaming of gender: "As the United Nations entity for gender equality and women's empowerment, how will UN Women, and by extension the UN, support the government of Sierra Leone in ensuring effective mainstreaming of gender across the Big 5 Game Changers?"



Ambassador Dónal Cronin, DPR of the Mission of Ireland to the UN (left) with Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Amara Sowa, DPR of the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN

Ms. Mbongbo thanked Ambassador Cronin and the Republic of Ireland for its aid and support, without which she said Sierra Leone would not have made the progress that it has. She then expressed her anticipation for the implementation of the GEWE Act and how it will affect the political climate in Sierra Leone. She credited Sierra Leone's remarkable progress to the increase in visionary leadership of the country and the commitment of young people.

In answer to the question posed to her, she said that UN Women is currently working on how to hold stakeholders accountable to the implementation of their commitment. "It is not enough for women to clear the road for women to be in the government, we need to give them the opportunity to provide the qualities that they have, the same way society invested in men," Ms. Mbongo noted.

Panelist 7:

Given the short time left for the tightly-timed event, Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator for the Youth Association in Sierra Leone, gave a brief remark: "I believe that the youths can play a pivotal role in raising awareness about impactful initiatives

related to the 5 Big Game Changers. Young people embody the vigor and determination necessary to champion agendas."



Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mbongbo, Head of Office, UN Women Sierra Leone with Hon. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development

She added that engaging more young people, especially who are female, would help facilitate goal accomplishment and create sustainable momentum of actions as they are the future leaders.



Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator, Youth Association in Sierra Leone

Closing remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by Mr. Gordon Tapper, President of the United African Congress and founder of one of the event's co-sponsors, Give Them A Hand Foundation. He acknowledged the efforts described by the panelists to support women and

mainstream gender throughout the government's plan as an excellent model. Along those lines, he took the opportunity to mention a project by he and colleagues – Larry Schaffer, former sales director of Swarovski Crystal, Mr. Ronnie VanderLinden, Vice President of the World Diamond Council, and Dr. Judy Kuriansky – to train women in diamond cutting and polishing in order to boost women's participation in, and benefit from, the country's economy.

Mr. Tapper then thanked the panelists for their excellent presentations and the audience for their keen attention. He congratulated President Bio on his efforts creating the Medium-Term Development Plan and the female ministers and parliamentarians for their ambition. He remarked, "Myview is that with their determination and their outlook, they will succeed."

On that note, moderator Ambassador Sowa announced the end of the event.



Mr. Gordon Tapper, President, United African Congress; Founder, Give Them A Hand Foundation, delivering closing remarks



(left to right): Mr. Gordon Tapper, President, United African Congress; Founder, Give Them A Hand Foundation; Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mbongbo, Head of Office, UN Women; Subina Khaneja; Zeever Baqar; Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalie, Gender Coordinator, Youth Association in Sierra Leone; Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the UN and representative of the co-sponsoring International Association of Applied Psychology; Hon. Isata Mahoi, Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs; H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Department Representative, Mission of Ireland to the United Nations; Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security; Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of the Republic to Sierra Leone Parliament; Emma Gaskins, Dahlia Alrawi, Montse Alonso



(left to right): Dr. Christine Roland-Lévy, IAAP Past-President, with students of Dr. Judy Kuriansky (center, in green) at Columbia University Teachers College in her class on "psychology and the United Nations" and her Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology Lab, who were event volunteer supporters: Emma Gaskins, Montse Alonso, Subina Khaneja, Zeever Baqar, Elaine Peng, Dahlia Alrawi, Jintianyue Huang

Event Overview

M

Title: Mainstreaming Gender in Big Five Game Changers in Sierra Leone Date/Time: March 19, 2024, 3:00PM-4:15PM EST Location: United Nations Headquarters, Conference Room C, New York City, USA Moderator: H.E. Ambassador Amara Soya, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent <u>RepresentativeReprentative</u> of the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations.

Opening Remarks: H.E. Ambassador Amara Soya **Closing Remarks:** Mr. Gordon Tapper, President, United African Congress; Founder, Give Them <u>A</u> Hand Foundation

Presenter: Ms. <u>M'balu</u> A. Kamara, Deputy Director, Rural Development Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Republic of Sierra <u>Leone;</u> Panelists:

Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education-
Sierra Leone
Hon. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and
Economic Development-Sierra Leone
Hon. Theresa Tenneh Dick, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and
Food Security, Sierra Leone
Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, Member of Parliament- Sierra Leone
H.E. Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Deputy Permanent Representative,
Mission of Ireland to the United Nations
Ms. Setcheme Jeronime Mongbo, Head of Office, UN Women,
Sierra Leone
Ms. Doris Augusta Tarawalic, Gender Coordinator, Youth
Association in Sierra Leone
ain sponsor: Government of Sierra Leone

Co-sponsors: Government of Ireland; UN Women; Women's Forum of Sierra Leone, International Association of Applied Psychology, Give Them \underline{A} Hand Foundation, Columbia University Teachers College Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab

Personal Reflections from the first author, Delaney Simchuk

This event in my estimation was an exceptional overview of the outstanding progress that Sierra Leone has made economically, socially, and globally in terms of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The fact that so many of the panelists and representatives of Sierra Leone present at this event were women was also indicative of how much progress Sierra Leone has made in bringing women to the forefront of leadership and decision-making. Sierra Leone's goal to mainstream gender in their Big Five Game Changers can be seen as paving the way for other countries to enact similar objectives. In the same vein, it was noteworthy how closely Sierra Leone's goals align with the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations. Specifically, in order for the UN to be able to achieve the SDGs at a global level, change needs to happen at the national level in each member country, and Sierra Leone is demonstrating this. Sierra Leone sets an impressive example for how a nation can achieve the crucial goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

I came into Dr. Judy Kuriansky's class about "Psychology and the United Nations" because I

wanted to focus on women's issues, and was so pleased that I got a chance to be part of this special experience, coming to the UN for the Commission on the Status of Women, and then learning what the country of Sierra Leone is accomplishing with regard to women's empowerment - which I found so inspiring. After hearing the First Lady of Sierra Leone speak about her experience leading the country through its gender issues and establishing groundbreaking policies to support women, at a special session of the class on International Women's Day on March 8 which kicks off CSW, attending this event at the UN hosted by Sierra Leone sounded like a perfect opportunity to learn more about Sierra Leone specifically. One of the most powerful speakers in my opinion in this event was Hon. Catherine Z. Tarawally, who spoke on behalf of the Parliament of Sierra Leone. She was a captivating public speaker and urged the other panelists to bring any issues they could to her and to Parliament so that Sierra Leone can continue to change their policies to empower women more. The fact that Sierra Leone has a parliamentary member like her showed me what a great example the women of Sierra Leone in leadership are setting for the country and the world.

Given my interests in women's issues, it was overall an amazing opportunity to attend the CSW68 conference hosted at the UN this Spring, and to be able to witness so many inspiring speakers and world leaders dedicated to empowering women on a global scale. I am taking away a newfound optimism for the modern feminist movement. As a future psychologist who hopes to focus on women's issues, the country of Sierra Leone is setting such an inspiring tone for the next generation of women, to which I hope to also contribute.

Acknowledgment: All photos in this article were taken by Arantza Alonso and slides are from slideshow decks from the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

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We are Changing the Game

Thank you for your attention

Photo Gallery



Gift bag with Sierra Leone flag, event team/co-sponsor IAAP members (left to right): Emma Gaskins, Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Zeever Baqar, Russell Daisey



Dr. Judy Kuriansky with Dahlia Alrawi



Attendees and speakers



Ambassador Dónal Cronin, Dr. Christine Roland-Levy, Dr. Judy Kuriansky and Ambassador Amara Sowa



Columbia University Teachers College student Zeever Baqar, Minster Isata Mahoi, Dr. Judy Kuriansky and Ambassador Dónal Cronin



'Columbia University Teachers College student Jintianyue Huang, on. Rev. Titus Williams, Deputy Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Ambassador Ernest Mbaimba Ndomahina, Commissioner, National Commission for Social Action



Minister Isata Mahoi, Minister Catherine Tarawally and Minister Chernor Bah



Student support team lead Emma Gaskins and Montse Gonzalez-Alonso, Dr. Kuriansky's students





Author Bios

Delaney Simchuk is pursuing her masters degree in Clinical Psychology at Teachers College Columbia University where she is a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." She is also a member of the Student Division of the International Association of Applied Psychology. Currently, she works in a research lab dedicated to studying infant-mother interaction and volunteers at a women's center in New York City, consistent with her strong interest and dedication to being an advocate for women's issues.

Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College adjunct faculty has a long history in the country of Sierra Leone providing psychosocial support programs and was awarded as Commander of the Order of the Rokel by H.E. Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio. She currently serves as Advisor to the Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and Policy Advisor to the H.E. Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States. For 20+ years she has headed NGOs with consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, the International Association of Applied Psychology and World Council for Psychotherapy. An active advocate about the empowerment of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about SDG5; supported the #Hands Off Our Girls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a coedited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Charles Vandi is the Deputy Chief Director, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs

Republic of Sierra Leone, in Freetown, where he has served for the past 20 years.

Emma Gaskins, M.A. graduated from Teachers College, Columbia University Masters Program in Developmental Psychology with a background in educational and developmental psychology research. Previously, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina, earning a B.A. in psychology and a minor in English. Currently, she serves as the Co-Manager of Teachers College, Columbia University's Global Advocacy and Applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab, actively contributing to advocacy initiatives for the advancement of youth mental health and well-being. These initiatives involve collaboration with ambassadors and delegates from United Nations mission offices, emphasizing the practical application of psychology in addressing global challenges. Her academic and professional interests seek to advance the development of youth, through educational settings, psychosocial interventions, or youth development programs. Her studies and research have focused on facilitating holistic, social-emotional approaches to learning and implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs, addressing multifaceted challenges faced by youth globally. Her goals are to implement programming which empowers young people to reach their full potential by encouraging positive growth and resilience in the face of challenges.

Mr. Gordon M. Tapper is the Founder and Chair of Give Them a Hand Foundation and President of the United African Congress. He served for over 35 years at the United Nations, including as Chief of Section in the Department of Administration and Management.

He executive produces innumerable events at the UN, including for the UN Commission on the Status of Women and World Interfaith Harmony Week, working with the Mission of Sierra Leone, and for many others events, including "Africa Rise" and "Raise the Roof" promoting healthcare to remote communities; fundraising events for the Sierra Leone-Jamaica Youth entrepreneurship and leadership training, and for the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative; and for the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN).

Ms. Roselynn Finda Senesi is Deputy Secretary in the Sierra Leone Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, and has an extensive file covering many issues on behalf of the Mission, including about women and girls, and disabilities.

Shattering Glass: Amplifying Women's Voices in the Halls of Power – The Role of Elected United Nations Security Council Members in Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

Akniyet Ozat and Dr. Judy Kuriansky

Overview

On March 6, the International Peace Institute (IPI) held a policy forum titled "Shattering Glass: Amplifying Women's Voices in the Halls of Power – The Role of Elected UN Security Council Members in Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda." The event was convened in the event conference room of the IPI headquarters in New York City, on the penthouse floor of 777 United Nations Plaza across the street from the United Nations headquarters, to a packed audience. It was conducted in a hybrid format, with both a live and online audience.

As described in its title, the event addressed how the voice of women has been advanced through the United Nations Security Council's Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, how the elected member states of the UN Security Council influence Security Council policy outcomes, and strategies and challenges faced in advancing the WPS Agenda within the Council, especially within the current challenging global context.

The use of the phrase "Shattering glass" in the title evokes the familiar metaphoric term "breaking the glass ceiling" which refers to eliminating barriers for women to advance in all fields, especially in the workplace.



Event invitation (International Peace Institute, 2024)

The panel was deliberately comprised of multistakeholders, including representatives from government, a UN Agency (appropriately, UN Women), academia, and civil society organizations. IPI co-hosted the event with the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), a research, documentation and information center on modern Africa for the Nordic countries.

Appropriately, four panelists represented countries with direct experience serving as elected nonpermanent Security Council (SC) members. These include Sierra Leone (a current Security Council member), Ireland (a member in the term 2021-2022), Norway (who also served a term in the year 2021-2022), and South Africa (who served for three terms, most recently in the year 2019-2020). Speakers on behalf of these countries were the current ambassadors of the UN Missions of Ireland and Norway, the First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone, and an independent consultant from South Africa.

Other panelists, knowledgeable on the topic, were from UN Women and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway.



The panel



Panelists and honored guests (left to right): Phoebe Donnelly, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, Anwarul Chowdhury, Merete Fjeld Brattested, Roselynn Finda Senesi, Sithembile Mbete, Louise Olsson, Therese Sjömander Magnusson, Fergal Mythen, and Angela Muvumba Sellström.

The discussion was grounded in the principles of SC Resolution 1325, which affirms the participation of women in the peace process. It also emphasized the need for innovative strategies to advance the WPS Agenda.

The event was positioned to be ahead of the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, a yearly two-week event whereby thousands of women and men would come to UN headquarters to discuss the issues of women's rights and empowerment.

The United Nations Security Council mandate is to uphold global peace and security. The Council is made up of five permanent members (the P5) and 10 rotating non-permanent member states (the E10) who are elected for short terms (IPI,2023). The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda is among the SC priorities.

A Q&A session followed the formal discussion.



Panelists and audience

The event on Shattering Glass: The United Nations Security Council, its Elected Ten, and Women, Peace, and Security

Specifics of the event

Opening remarks: Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President of IPI, and Therese Sjömander Magnusson, Director NAI

Panelists:

*H.E. Ambassador Merete Fjeld Brattested, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations

*H.E. Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

*Ms. Roselynn Finda Senesi, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

*Ms. Louise Olsson, Research Director of Global Norms, Politics and Society at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway

*Ms. Sithembile Mbete, Independent Consultant and former Director of Programmes of Futurelect *Mr. Pablo Castillo Díaz, Policy Specialist on Peace and Security for UN Women (participating virtually)



Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President of IPI

The President of IPI, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, delivered the opening address, emphasizing the importance of increasing women's participation in decisionmaking processes and overcoming challenges. He wished all participants a successful forum.



Therese Sjömander Magnusson, Director of NAI

Next, **Therese Sjömander Magnusson**, Director of the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), provided an overview of the Institute's work, promoting an understanding of contemporary African perspectives and social dynamics. The NAI is a research, documentation, and information center for Nordic countries in modern Africa that conducts independent, policy-relevant research, provides analysis, and informs decision-making to advance research-based knowledge of contemporary Africa. The Institute collaborates with

over 50 African institutions and conducts research in more than 30 countries. The Institute conducted a multi-year research project with the title upon which this event was founded, namely, "Shattering Glass: How Elected Members of the UN Security Council Fight for Women, Peace, and Security," in partnership with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (Norway). The project explored the work of the non-permanent members of SC related to Women, Peace, and Security in the context of capacities of the nonpermanent member states and power dynamics and processes within the Council to make their contributions more impactful and effective.

Ms. Phoebe Donnelly, Senior Fellow and head of the Women, Peace, and Security Program at IPI, served as moderator for the event. The format was that Ms. Donnelly posed a question on the topic to each panelist.



IPI's Phoebe Donnelly, moderator of the panel

First, moderator Donnelly posed a question to Her Excellency Ambassador Merete Fjeld Brattested, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN: "What do you feel was Norway's most significant achievement in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda during your recent time as an elected member of the Security Council? Did you face any obstacles in reaching Women, Peace, and Security on the Security Council, and how did you navigate them?"

In her answer, H.E. Brattested highlighted three crucial points:

1. Systematic Integration of WPS:

We systematically incorporated Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) into the council's agenda and integrated WPS into thematic and country-specific discussions as a consistent element of all council work.

2. Operationalizing WPS:

We focused on translating resolutions and statements into tangible changes on the ground. To enhance implementation in specific country contexts, we utilized the informal expert group on WPS, chaired by Norway, among others.

3. Partnership and Collaboration:

We emphasized the importance of partnerships with countries, civil society, and women's organizations. We recognize these multiple actors as vital for facilitating real change and providing valuable insights for the Security Council's work.

She said that her country prioritized women civil society briefers' meaningful and safe participation in formal and informal meetings.



H.E. Ambassador Merete Fjeld Brattested, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN

Next, the moderator addressed a question to His. Excellency Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN: "Ambassador, could you share Ireland's approach to advancing Women, Peace, and Security during your tenure on the Security Council? What specific initiatives or strategies did you employ to ensure the agenda was prioritized"?

In his response, H.E. Mythen mentioned that during their term in the SC, Ireland had integrated the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda across all Security Council discussions, focusing on the impacts on women and girls and including their perspectives. He noted three areas of Ireland's approach to advancing the WPS Agenda:

Supporting Peacebuilders: We prioritized supporting women and human rights defenders, advocating for their participation in peace processes, and protecting them from reprisals.

Operationalizing WPS: We worked on making the WPS agenda actionable by pushing for commitments from UN entities and member states and improving accountability through better monitoring and reporting.

Collaboration and Challenges: We emphasized collaboration to advance the implementation of the WPS Agenda, acknowledging challenges but contributing to increased awareness and action.

Ireland initiated the Presidency Trio of Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico as three non-permanent members of the SC who committed to prioritizing Women, Peace, and Security in concrete and tangible ways during their respective presidencies of the SC during September, October, and November of 2021.

"Shoehorning women, peace, and security one week in October is tokenizing," he said. "There needs to be more implementation, more meaningful and sustained participation of women." He explained that the Trio successfully represented a crossregional approach to committing to action, while

acknowledging that much more improvement and progress need to be made.



H.E. Ambassador Fergal Mythen, with Professor Judy Kuriansky

Next, the moderator addressed a question to Ms. Roselynn Finda Senesi, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN: "Given Sierra Leone's well-documented commitment to this cause, you must share your plans and priorities for advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in your new role. We would like to know the tools or mechanisms you consider essential for enhancing the implementation of the WPS resolutions, particularly at the local level".

In her response, Ms. Senesi said, "Women on the frontlines don't want good rhetoric; they need action, accountability, and change." She highlighted these five points:

Commitment to WPS: As co-chair of the informal expert group on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), we are dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda, focusing on implementing impactful WPS resolutions locally.

Engagement with Civil Society: We prioritize strengthening ties with civil society, especially

women-led organizations, to leverage their grassroots insights for more effective WPS policy implementation and support the protection of women civil society briefers.

Capacity Building: We emphasize education and capacity-building for women and girls to empower their participation and leadership in peace and security efforts.

Feedback Mechanisms: We advocate mechanisms allowing information and feedback to flow from local communities to global discussions, ensuring that local experiences shape UN policies.

Accountability Frameworks: We support implementing frameworks for tracking WPS progress, using benchmarks and indicators to ensure commitments are met and challenges addressed. Speaking from the perspective of an African country on the SC, she noted the need for more collaboration between regional stakeholders supporting WPS and the African Union. Also important, she said, is use of precise language when speaking about WPS.



Ms. Roselynn Finda Senesi, First Secretary, Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN

The moderator then requested panelist Dr. Louise Olsson to add further insight. Dr. Olsson observed the strategic choices and critical tactical maneuvers E10 (elected) members can take to advance the Women's Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. She explained that her expertise is rooted in a deep

understanding of the gender dynamics of war, the effects of conflict resolution on women, women's rights, and the implementation of WPS in Nordic national security and defense policies.

She made the following points regarding how elected members can contribute to the WPS Agenda: **Enhancing the Normative Framework:** Elected members can contribute to strengthening the WPS framework by integrating it with other thematic areas and pushing for resolutions that underline the importance of women in peacekeeping and security processes.

Improving Working Methods: By adapting the Council's working methods, elected members can ensure WPS considerations are integrated into regular decisions. This involves using the presidency to advocate for WPS, inviting relevant briefers, and leveraging informal mechanisms like the Informal Expert Group on WPS to institutionalize gender considerations.

Implementation Through Decisions: By focusing on the practical implementation of WPS in the council's decisions, elected members can integrate clear and actionable WPS language into resolutions and statements. This approach emphasizes the need for specificity and clarity and signals the importance of WPS.

Dr. Olsson also noted the importance of strategic preparation, efficient resource allocation, and consistent signaling of WPS priorities by elected members. These strategies help advance the WPS agenda and require elected members to carefully consider their positions, allocate resources judiciously, and maintain a clear commitment to WPS objectives.

Next, the moderator invited Dr. Sithembile Mbete to give a perspective on WPS in an academic context. A South African national, Dr. Mbete is an independent consultant and former director of Futurelect programs in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria, where she lectures on international relations and South African politics. She isalsoan Associate Fellow of the Centrefor Governance Innovation (GovInn) at the University of Pretoria.



Louise Olsson, Research Director, Global Norms, Politics and Society, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Given her extensive experience in academia, civil society, and government, Dr. Mbete discussed South Africa's role and contributions to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda within the context of the Security Council. She highlighted how African E10 member states drive the Agenda forward and how South Africa's foreign policy aligns with WPS implementation challenges. She made the following points:

South Africa's Leadership in WPS: Across its three terms on the Security Council, South Africa emphasized the WPS agenda, leveraging its historical experience and commitment to gender equality. Key actions included initiating discussions on WPS outside the traditional October framework, striving to mainstream WPS language in resolutions, and promoting women's roles in peace processes and leadership in peacekeeping missions.

Operationalizing WPS Commitment: South Africa's operational approach to the WPS Agenda is

evident in its attempts to incorporate WPS language into country-specific resolutions, emphasizing the significance of women in peacebuilding, governance, and peace missions. Additionally, South Africa successfully pushed for the unanimous adoption of resolution 2493, reiterating the council's commitment to the WPS Agenda.

Domestic and International Nexus on WPS: Despite advocating for WPS internationally, South Africa faced challenges with gender-based violence domestically. The country's first National Action Plan on WPS, adopted in 2020, represents an effort to apply international WPS principles to address internal gender-based violence issues, highlighting the interconnectedness of South Africa's domestic policies and global advocacy.

African E10 States' Role and Collaboration: South Africa's approach exemplifies the broader African commitment to WPS, emphasizing synergy between the UN and the African Union (AU) and the importance of presenting united African perspectives on WPS issues.

Overall, Dr. Mbete underlined South Africa's strategic use of its Security Council terms to advance the WPS Agenda, its efforts to integrate WPS principles domestically, and the critical role of African E10 states in championing the WPS Agenda regionally and globally.

Next, a question was posed to Pablo Castillo Díaz, Policy Specialist on Peace and Security for UN Women, who was joining the meeting virtually. From his perspective, representing the UN Agency that focuses on women's rights, Mr. Diaz agreed with the points made by the other panelists about the critical role of integrating the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda into the decisions of the Security Council, including the important contributions made by the E10 members. Besides also incorporating language of WPS into Council decisions, he highlighted several impactful ways to advance the Agenda:



Ms. Sithembile Mbete, an independent consultant"

Filling Gaps in Sanctions Committees: This involves addressing gaps in the mandates of sanctions committees related to ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Sudan, and advocating for stronger language in mission drawdown contexts like the DRC and Somalia. This includes prescriptive language on women's participation in various contexts.

Beyond Language: This means encouraging members to look beyond textual commitments and to engage in meaningful actions. This could include Council visits to conflict zones (for example, the DRC) to directly address issues of sexual violence by presenting lists of individuals implicated in such crimes.

Public Statements and Consultations: These are useful to raise specific WPS issues, question what is omitted from the Secretary-General's reports, and advocate for including detailed information on women's participation in peace processes.

Diplomatic Efforts Behind the Scenes: These efforts involve engaging in diplomatic dialogue with the Secretary-General, envoys, and conflict parties to emphasize the importance of the

WPS Agenda. Action includes writing to entities involved in peace negotiations to remind them of their obligations, using the Council's language on women's participation.

Mr. Diaz's comments underlined the importance of both formal decisions and proactive, strategic actions by Security Council members to ensure that the WPS Agenda is effectively integrated and advanced in all peace and security discussions.



Pablo Castillo Díaz, Policy Specialist on Peace and Security, UN Women

After the panelists presented their experience, views and recommendations, the moderator recognized a significant figure sitting in the front row of the audience: His Excellency Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury. Ambassador Chowdhury, who had served as Ambassador of the Mission of Bangladesh to the UN (1996-2001), during which time Bangladesh served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council (2000-2001). Significantly, Ambassador Chowdhury was highly relevant to the present discussion since he was responsible for spearheading the landmark Security Council Resolution 1352 that set the stage for incorporating gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts and notably designated rape as a weapon of war.

In his remarks, Ambassador Chowdhury highlighted the critical role and potential of the E10 (elected members) of the UN Security Council in advancing forward-looking initiatives that includes the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. He emphasized the importance of embedding feminist principles in all decision-making processes, irrespective of whether policies are explicitly labeled as feminist. Proudly identifying himself as a feminist, he advocated for the election of a woman as the next Secretary-General to the UN and stressed the need for gender equality at all the highest levels of international governance.

Taking a multi-level approach, in addition to international steps, he underlined the significance of implementing the WPS Agenda through National Action Plans as well as appreciating the crucial role of civil society. In that latter regard, he advocated for the E10 to regularly consult with civil society to ensure vibrant and diverse perspectives in implementing the WPS Agenda.

Referring to Nelson Mandela's efforts to include women at the peace table, he highlighted the importance of women's genuine and full participation in peace processes.

Taking a more judgmental stance at the end of his intervention, Ambassador Chowdhury criticized the UN Secretariat for not fully internalizing the WPS Agenda and urged the UN, particularly UN Women, to place Resolution 1325 at the core of their work. He lamented bureaucratic delays in supporting countries to develop their National Action Plans. Finally, he called for more proactive support from the Secretary-General and senior UN management to prioritize the WPS Agenda.

The Q and A Session

A range of vital topics related to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, feminist foreign policies, and the unique roles and challenges faced by E10 (elected members) of the UN Security Council were raised during the Q and A session with the audience. The session began with a question about the nexus between the WPS Agenda and feminist foreign policies, where the person noted how some countries, like Mexico, Germany, and France,

have embraced feminist foreign policies that have contributed to the WPS Agenda. Ambassador Mythen responded by discussing the absence of a labeled feminist foreign policy by countries, despite their leadership in WPS, emphasizing actions over labels, that integrate gender equality across all policy dimensions without having to call a country a "feminist" government.



Akniyet Ozat (right) with gender rights groundbreaking diplomat Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury

Further discussion explored the effectiveness and potential reforms of the informal expert group on WPS, the utility of mission visits for firsthand understanding of gender issues in conflict zones, and the collaboration with Ministries of Defense for incorporating gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations. Each panelist shared insights from their country's experience, underscoring the importance of political will, resource allocation, and strategic implementation to drive the WPS Agenda forward. Ms. Sinesi from Sierra Leone thanked the participants for their questions and elaborated on Sierra Leone's commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. She highlighted Sierra Leone's proactive stance in the African Union, the United Nations, and the General Assembly, emphasizing the country's dedication to WPS as one of its top priorities. This commitment stems from Sierra Leonean women's significant role in shaping the WPS Agenda, even before the Security Council formally recognized the Agenda.

Ms. Senesi mentioned Sierra Leone's co-chairing of the informal expert group (IEG) as a "divine intervention," indicating a passionate effort to address emerging issues and critical situations in countries experiencing internal conflicts like Sudan, Yemen, Haiti, and the DRC. She noted Sierra Leone's intention to enhance the mandate of the WPS Agenda in the SC, taking advantage of the valuable lessons learned from Norway and Ireland's commitment to the Agenda.

Regarding the issue of country's labeling themselves as "feminist." Ms. Senesi explained that such a label is not necessary for Sierra Leone even though the current President Julius Maada Bio has made exceptionally significant advances regarding women's empowerment, specifically mainstreaming gender across the entire development plan. For example, this is evident in the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, which mandates a minimum of 30% female employment in both private and public sectors, showcasing the government's serious approach to promoting gender equality.



(left to right) Akniyet Ozat; fellow student in Dr. Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations" Meizhu Liu; Deputy Permanent Representative of Latvia to the UN, Olegs Llgis; Dr. Judy Kuriansky, IPI moderator Phoebe Donnelly

Closing Remarks

In closing remarks, Ms. Angela Mumba Selström, Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), encapsulated key insights from the panel discussion on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the role of elected members (E10) of the Security Council. In doing this, she emphasized the innovation brought about by the E10 countries, using Norway, Ireland, and Sierra Leone as examples of addressing challenges within the WPS Agenda, including efforts to protect women civil society briefers from reprisals and to create institutional mechanisms for sustaining the WPS work beyond individual Council memberships. She thanked IPI for organizing the event and appreciated the privilege of engaging with the UN community.

Further, she noted that each E10 country brings its unique gender profile and domestic agenda to the Council, which shapes its contributions to the WPS Agenda. Despite these exceptional contributions, she acknowledged that E10 members face typical constraints, such as the Council's expanding pace and agenda. She emphasized the importance of forming alliances, understanding capacity, and having a strategic purpose to overcome these challenges.

She praised E10 members' innovative approaches to reform and influence the Security Council "by stealth," highlighting the dynamic interplay between power inequalities and the capacity for impactful change.

She also specifically praised Sierra Leone for its commitment to making "the absence of women in peace processes visible" because it is "the right thing to do." Also, she thanked Pablo Castillo Diaz from UN Women for his concrete recommendations and contributions to the "Shattering Glass" research project.

Overall, the discussion raised critical issues and elucidated very fundamental but under-recognized concepts and dynamics that underscore and inhibit progress in achieving gender equity and that essentially constrain men from fully participating in a more gender-equitable world, which would lead to more social progress.



Angela Muvumba Sellström, Senior Researcher and Project Lead for NAI's "E10, WPS and the UN Security Council"



(left to right): Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Akniyet Ozat, Ms. Finda Senesi; Fiona Broderick. Human Rights and WPS lead at Ireland's Permanent Mission to the UN

Personal reflections of Akniyet Ozat

I am very grateful to Professor Judy Kuriansky and thank her for the opportunity to participate in this exceptional event. Attending the "Shattering Glass" event organized by the International Peace

Institute (IPI) was an enriching and thoughtprovoking experience that left a lasting impression on me. The focus on the role of the elected ten (E10) members of the United Nations Security Council in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda underscored for me the importance of collaborative and inclusive efforts in global peace and security initiatives. Reflecting on the event, I am struck by the complexity and urgency of integrating gender considerations into international peace and security efforts. The presentations and discussion highlighted the importance of persistence, innovation, and collaboration in overcoming institutional and systemic barriers to gender equality. The role of the E10 in leveraging its position to advance the WPS Agenda surely offers hope and a blueprint for future efforts. It is clear that achieving gender equality in peace and security is not only a matter of justice but is crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives worldwide. This event has reinforced my belief in the power of collective action and the importance of pushing for gender-inclusive approaches in all aspects of peace and security policymaking.

EVENT OVERVIEW

TITLE: Shattering Glass: The United Nations Security Council, its Elected Ten, and Women, Peace, and Security

Date/Time: Wednesday, 6 March 2024, 9:45AM– 11:30AM EDT

Location: Trygve Lie Center for Peace, Security & Development

International Peace Institute 777 United Nations Plaza, 12th floor New York City

Moderator: Phoebe Donnelly, Senior Fellow and Head of the Women, Peace, and Security Program, International Peace Institute

Welcoming Remarks:

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, President, IPI Therese Sjömander Magnusson, Director, NAI **Panelists:**

H.E. Merete Fjeld Brattested, Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN

H.E. Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of

Ireland to the UN

Ms. Roselynn Finda Senesi, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN Ms. Louise Olsson, Research Director, Global Norms, Politics and Society, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Ms. Sithembile Mbete, Independent Consultant, former Director of Programmes, Futurelect

Mr. Pablo Castillo Díaz, Policy Specialist on Peace and Security, UN Women (virtual)

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Author Bios

Reported by **Akniyet Ozat**, a Masters degree student in the Department of International and Comparative Education, Columbia University Teachers College, a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations" and a member of the student division of the International Association of Applied Psychology. In addition, he is also the founder of the Gaclia YouTube channel, which focuses on humanitarian science and boasts over 1 million viewers, and the literature hermeneutic club (Angime-Duken) at the university. His excellence was recognized by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan's "Bolashak" International Scholarship for Young Talents in 2019. He is fluent in Kazakh, Russian, and English and have advanced proficiency in Turkish.

Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University Teachers College, who teaches a unique "Psychology and the United Nations" course on the adjunct faculty. At the United Nations, she is also a representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and Advisor for the Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. Further, she is Policy Advisor to Ambassador Sidique Wai, Chief of Mission of the Embassy of the Republic of Sierra Leone in Washington DC. A former television reporter, radio talk show host and newspaper columnist and award-winning journalist, she is the author of many professional journal articles and books on international issues, including disaster recovery, Ebola, migration, grassroots peacebuilding in the Middle East ("Beyond Bullets and Bombs"), the Intersection of Psychology and Environmental Protection, and about Women Around the World. She has advocated for, organized innumerable events and conferences, and spoken at the UN and worldwide about the intersection of mental health and the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda, including peace, education, gender equality, climate action, and partnerships. She co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp in Africa, supported the #HandsOffOurGirls initiative of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio, co-founded the Stand Up for Peace Project, and conducted innumerable workshops during conflicts, disaster, and peacetime on resilience, peacebuilding and conflict resolution as well as co-organized innumerable events at the United Nations including for the Commission on the Status of Women.

From Tradition to Transformation: Women's Roles in Spiritual Healing and Global Health

Initiatives

Robert L. Baker III

In the framework of global development and cultural influence, religion stands as a significant factor. It shapes ethical values, social norms, and individual behaviors, serving as a spiritual guide and also as a major force in societal organization and governance. Christianity, with its extensive historical reach and profound theological depth, offers unique insights into human dignity and responsibility. Central to Christian doctrine is the concept articulated in Genesis 1:27-28, where humanity, both male and female, is created in God's image and entrusted with the stewardship of Earth, as in this passage: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:27-28, ESV)

This passage underscores a fundamental equality and shared custodianship that transcends time and cultural boundaries, aligning remarkably with contemporary global challenges addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The UN agenda is a framework agreed upon by the 193 governments of the United Nations, that underscores their commitment to achieve a better world for people and the planet, (United Nations, 2015). SDG5 calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and an end to all forms of violence against women and girls, (United Nations, 2022).

This scripture quoted above establishes a theological basis for gender equality and also sets a precedent for environmental stewardship, positioning men and women as co-guardians of the natural world. Such a perspective is critical at this time when the world faces unprecedented ecological challenges and gender disparities. The integration of these ancient biblical principles with modern development goals invites a reevaluation of how religious traditions and teachings can be harnessed to foster a more equitable and sustainable world.

This paper is a literature review exploring the multifaceted roles that women in Christianity have played and continue to play, which could be pivotal in advancing their own status and also in driving forward the broader agenda encapsulated by the SDGs. Through this lens, I examine how the empowerment of women within Christian contexts can catalyze progress towards global mental health, equality, and environmental sustainability, echoing the dual call to equality and stewardship ordained in Genesis. This exploration into the roles of women highlights a broader theme: Christianity's profound capacity to influence societal norms and individual behaviors across the globe.

Background

Christianity, commanding a following of over two billion globally, stands as a spiritual guide and also as a major architect of social, cultural, and individual dynamics. This major world religion not only dictates spiritual pursuits but also significantly shapes societal norms, laws, and individual behaviors across continents. The influence of Christianity extends beyond personal belief systems, deeply embedding itself into the very fabric of national policies, community interactions, and even economic practices. From the establishment of educational institutions and hospitals to influencing legal frameworks and governance, Christianity's imprint on societal infrastructure is both vast and varied. In many parts of the world, Christian doctrines have historically shaped societal expectations and behaviors, influencing everything from marriage

and family life to social justice movements. Another passage expresses this point: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16, ESV)

Complex Roles of Women

Within the expansive framework of Christianity, the roles of women are particularly complex and varied. These roles are significantly shaped by theological interpretations and cultural traditions, which can differ dramatically from one Christian community to another. In some contexts, women take on leadership roles such as pastors, theologians, and community leaders, challenging traditional norms and advocating for social change. In others, women are in supportive or background roles, conforming to traditional expectations and norms of family care and community service, as in the scripture: "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet." (Proverbs 31:20-21, ESV).

These divergent roles are not static and have evolved over time, influenced by broader social movements and theological reinterpretations. For example, the rise of feminist theology in the late 20th century has prompted a reexamination of traditional roles and led to increased advocacy for gender equality within religious communities.

Impact on Social and Mental Well-being

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2, ESV)

The roles women occupy within Christian contexts impact their social standing and mental wellbeing in profound ways. Leadership roles may provide women with a sense of empowerment and a platform to effect change, thereby enhancing their mental health and social status. Conversely, restrictive roles may contribute to social isolation or diminished self-esteem, adversely affecting mental health. The mental health of women in Christian communities is also influenced by the support or strain of their roles, which can vary widely depending on the cultural and theological context.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing global mental health issues. By examining how the varied roles of women in Christian communities affect their well-being and social status, stakeholders can better design interventions that respect cultural nuances and promote healthier, more equitable communities.

Where Have Women Been? Integration of Traditional Healing Practices

It is important to highlight the existence of religion and women's role in spiritual practice and its benefits to society before the onset of the Abrahamic faiths. Throughout history, women have been at the forefront of traditional healing practices, utilizing a blend of spiritual, herbal, and holistic approaches to care for their communities. These practices are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual fabric of societies and offer valuable insights into holistic health and well-being. In many indigenous and traditional cultures, women healers use their knowledge of herbs, rituals, and spiritual guidance to treat physical and mental ailments, providing an essential support system where modern healthcare may be lacking (Mariano-Grise, 2023; Psychology Today, 2023).

These traditional practices often emphasize the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit, promoting a comprehensive approach to health that aligns closely with modern concepts of holistic care. By recognizing and integrating these traditional healing methods, modern health initiatives can be enriched, fostering a deeper respect for cultural diversity and traditional knowledge (NPY Women's Council, 2023).

By acknowledging the contributions of traditional healing practices led by women, this literature review highlights a broader theme: the profound capacity of cultural and spiritual traditions to influence societal norms and individual behaviors, advancing the goals of mental health, equality, and sustainability.

Purpose and Scope

The scope of this review encompasses an analysis of academic literature, case studies, and empirical research that explores the intersection of Christianity, women's roles, and global mental health. By focusing on both the empowering and limiting aspects of these roles, this review aims to uncover patterns, challenges, and opportunities that can inform policy making and community programming. Additionally, this review explores strategic ways in which global institutions like the United Nations can harness the potential of women in religious settings to alleviate disparities in public health and gender equality goals.

Review of Relevant Literature

As historian and retired professor of Religious Studies Mary T.Malone (2001) discusses, the roles of women in Christianity have evolved significantly from the early church to the modern era, reflecting broader societal changes and theological debates. Historically, women's roles in early Christianity were notably prominent. In the nascent Christian communities, women served as deacons, prophets, and even apostles. Notable figures like Phoebe, who is referred to as a deacon in the book of Romans, and Lydia, who is described in Acts as a key supporter of Paul, illustrate the active participation of women in the early spread of Christianity. The Gospels also recount several instances where women were among the closest followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, who was the first to witness and proclaim his resurrection.

Despite these early examples, the subsequent institutionalization of the Church brought with it more restrictive norms. By late antiquity and into the Middle Ages, the role of women became more circumscribed, with church leadership solidifying into a predominantly male hierarchy. The theological debates of the time often reinforced a view of women that was ambivalent, acknowledging their spiritual capabilities while frequently emphasizing their supposed moral and physical weaknesses. This led to a paradox where women could be revered as saints and mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen and Teresa of Ávila, yet were often excluded from formal ecclesiastical authority, (Malone, 2001).

The modern era witnessed a slow but inexorable shift in the roles of women within Christianity. The Protestant Reformation, for instance, altered some perspectives by advocating for the priesthood of all believers, which theoretically included women, although in practice, leadership roles for women remained limited. It wasn't until the 19th and 20th centuries that significant changes began to occur, with the rise of the women's suffrage movement and broader societal shifts towards gender equality influencing Christian thought and practices.

In the 20th century, mainline Protestant denominations started to ordain women formally. The Episcopal Church in the United States ordained its first female priests in 1974, and many other Protestant denominations followed suit. This period also saw an increase in women taking on pastoral roles, influencing theological scholarship, and participating in church governance.

In contemporary Christianity, the role of women varies widely across denominations and cultural contexts. In many Protestant denominations, women serve at all levels of leadership from pastors to bishops and church moderators. The Pentecostal movement, in particular, has seen a significant number of women in leadership roles, often emphasizing personal spiritual experience over institutional authority, which has provided a conducive environment for female leaders.

Conversely, the Roman Catholic Church and most Orthodox churches do not ordain women as priests, a position based on traditional interpretations of scripture and church doctrine. However, women in these traditions are increasingly recognized for their contributions in other areas of church life, such as education, administration, and lay leadership. Additionally, movements within these traditions continue to advocate for greater roles for women, including debates over the diaconate for women in the Catholic Church, (Malone, 2001).

Furthermore, across many denominations, women are influential in Christian social movements, charity work, and global missions, often driving social change and community service initiatives that reflect the core Christian values of compassion and justice. Germain to the conversation here, in contemporary Christianity, the roles of women are shaped not only by theological discussions but also by pressing global issues such as gender inequality, climate change, and economic disparity. Women across various Christian denominations are increasingly at the forefront of addressing these challenges, utilizing their positions within their communities to advocate for sustainable development, social justice, and global health.

This activism is seen in initiatives ranging from local community outreach to international advocacy that aligns with the broader objectives of the Sustainable DevelopmentGoals (SDGs). These roles have positioned Christian women uniquely as catalysts for change, particularly in the realm of global mental health. The well-being of communities—so deeply influenced by social and environmental factors-is an area where the leadership and advocacy of Christian women are becoming indispensable. As stewards of faith and justice, their involvement often extends to creating supportive environments that promote mental health resilience, emphasizing the importance of mental wellness as part of holistic health that is vital for achieving overall community well-being. This integration of spiritual leadership and health advocacy marks a critical point of intersection that highlights the broader impact of women's roles in religious settings on global mental health initiatives, (Holt & Tohidi, 2020).

The concept of "ambivalent sexism", as discussed by psychologists Mikołajczak and Pietrzak (2014), illustrates the dual nature of sexism that women often face in religious contexts. Hostile sexism manifests through overtly negative attitudes and behaviors towards women who defy traditional gender roles, whereas benevolent sexism cloaks itself in the guise of protective paternalism, idealizing women as pure but inherently weaker beings who must be shielded and supported. These sexist attitudes, underpinned by religious doctrines, contribute to a complex framework within which women navigate their roles in society.

Religious texts and teachings, often interpreted through a patriarchal lens, have historically reinforced gender stereotypes by assigning and restricting gender roles according to perceived spiritual or moral hierarchies. For instance, the traditional view that men are divinely ordained as leaders both in the family and religious communities has justified and sustained a variety of discriminatory practices against women, ranging from exclusion from clergy to limitations on their participation in religious and community decision-making.

However, as Mikołajczak and Pietrzak (2014) note, these beliefs and practices are not immutable. They evolve and adapt in response to shifts in societal norms and values. Modern interpretations of religious texts increasingly challenge traditional views, advocating for a more equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities. This evolution is influenced by broader social movements, including feminism and gender equality, which have prompted religious communities worldwide to reexamine and often reinterpret their doctrines in ways that promote greater inclusivity.

Furthermore, the interpretative practices within religious communities are critical to this evolution. The diversity of interpretation among different denominations or within the same religious tradition can lead to significantly different roles for women. For example, while some Christian denominations ordain women as priests and bishops, others hold

firm to male-only clergy based on their readings of the same scriptures. This dynamic interplay between religious beliefs, gender attitudes, and societal changes underscores the complexity of the roles that women assume in religious communities. It highlights the potential for transformation within these communities and raises important questions about how religious doctrines can both hinder and facilitate progress toward gender equality.

Furthermore, the role of women in religion and their societal treatment within religious frameworks are altered not only temporally, but regionally, and culturally. Research from Harvard University points out that in many African communities, religious beliefs are deeply intertwined with cultural traditions and social norms, creating a scenario where religion can both empower and restrict women (Harvard Africa, n.d.). In some regions, Christian churches have served as pivotal platforms for social change, offering a voice and sanctuary for women advocating for greater rights and equality. These churches often support initiatives aimed at improving education, healthcare, and legal rights for women, thereby challenging entrenched societal norms that discriminate against women.

For example, numerous Christian organizations across Africa have been involved in movements to end practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, which are deeply rooted in both cultural and, sometimes, religious traditions. These organizations use their moral and ethical influence to advocate for women's health and autonomy, leveraging religious teachings about dignity and equality to counter traditional practices harmful to women.

However, the same religious institutions can also reinforce traditional roles that limit women's participation in both public and religious life. In some communities, the interpretation of religious texts promotes a patriarchal structure that confines women to subordinate roles. This can be seen in practices where women are not allowed to hold leadership positions within the church or their participation is restricted to roles that support male leaders, such as administrative or caregiving tasks, without any real authority or voice in decision-making processes.

This dichotomy is often a reflection of the broader societal conflicts between modernity and tradition, where religion can be a tool for both progressive change and conservative resistance. The influence of colonial history, where missionary work and indigenous beliefs collided and merged, has also played a significant role in shaping the current religious landscape in Africa. This history complicates the picture further, as different denominations and sects might adopt varying stances on women's rights based on their historical interactions with powers and indigenous colonial cultures. However, women today have made great strides both within and without the context of religion. Feminism as a movement has enabled women broader freedoms today than at any point in history. Conversely, Christian women have been able to use this growing freedom and their platforms to tackle many of the SDGs as set forth by the United Nations.

Empowering Women in Faith-Driven-Mental Health Initiatives

Women are increasingly at the forefront of faith-driven initiatives that directly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. Target 3.4 calls for specifically promoting mental health and well-being. International non-governmental organizations like World Vision and the World Council of Churches provide documentation and case studies showing how women in Christian communities integrate mental health into broader health and social services. These women lead initiatives that destigmatize mental health issues, advocate for better resources, and provide community support systems (World Vision, 2020; World Council of Churches, 2019).

Christian women are using their platforms and networks within the church to destigmatize mental health issues, advocate for better resources, and provide support systems for those affected. For in-

stance, church-based support groups led by women not only offer spiritual comfort but also bridge gaps to mental health resources in the community. These groups can be especially effective in areas where mental health services are scarce or stigmatized.

Furthermore, many of the root causes of mental health issues, such as poverty, inequality, and violence, are also the focus of the broader SDG agenda. The reports by UN Women – the United Nations agency mandated to address women's issues - detail how women in faith communities address these causes by leading initiatives that improve economic opportunities, advocate for gender equality, and support educational programs (UN Women, 2021). These efforts create healthier, more stable environments that support mental well-being. Advocacy work by Christian women often involves mobilizing and educating church communities about the SDGs and the importance of mental health. By framing these issues within the context of religious teachings about care for the marginalized, these women effectively rally broader support for mental health initiatives (Pew Research Center, 2018). This approach fulfills their spiritual mission and also aligns with global efforts to improve health outcomes.

Mental health issues are a global concern, manifesting uniquely across different environmental, social, and cultural landscapes. The World Health Organization (WHO) specifically highlights the impact of climate change on mental health, underscoring how extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes lead to significant psychosocial stress. These events often result in displacement, the loss of property and livelihoods, and long-term disruption in the life of affected communities, all of which can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or precipitate new ones (WHO, 2022), disproportionately affect women. Women often bear the brunt of these hardships due to existing gender inequalities, which can amplify the psychological stress they experience. These disruptions can lead to heightened anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among women, who are frequently responsible for managing household stability in

the face of such crises. Consequently, the impact on women's mental health is both profound and multifaceted, underscoring the need for targeted mental health interventions that address these specific challenges faced by women.

In the wake of such climate crises, religious organizations frequently become pivotal in addressing the ensuing mental health challenges. These groups often offer a first line of response in regionswheretraditionalmentalhealthinfrastructure is either overwhelmed by sudden demand or chronically underfunded and understaffed. For instance, in the aftermath of natural disasters, churches, mosques, temples, and other religious centers often serve not only as physical refuges but also as centers for emotional and psychological support. Clergy and religious volunteers are commonly among the first to provide counseling and organize community support groups, offering a sense of stability and hope in chaotic situations.

Samaritan's Purse, a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization, exemplifies this role through its extensive disaster relief efforts. In times of crisis, Samaritan's Purse mobilizes quickly to provide not only physical necessities like food, water, and shelter but also crucial emotional and psychological support. Their teams, which include trained counselors and chaplains, work on the ground to offer comfort and guidance to those affected by disasters. By establishing emergency field hospitals and clinics, they address immediate health needs while also providing a safe space for individuals to process their trauma and begin healing. The holistic approach of Samaritan's Purse ensures that both the physical and mental health needs of disaster-stricken communities are met, highlighting the vital role of faith-based organizations in comprehensive disaster response.

Moreover, the spiritual support provided by these organizations can be crucial for psychological resilience. Many individuals draw strength from their religious faith to cope with the loss and uncertainty brought about by environmental

catastrophes. After the devastating Haiti earthquake and tsunami in Sri Lanka, religious faith or spiritual belief was found to be helpful for survivors to cope with the disaster (Kuriansky, 2012, 2017; Kuriansky et al., 2017; Kalajian et al., 2010). In addition to spiritual counseling, religious groups often partner with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international aid agencies to deliver practical assistance such as food, shelter, and medical care, which can alleviate the immediate stresses contributing to mental health decline.

Cultural variability significantly shapes how mental health solutions are perceived and implemented across different communities. In her comprehensive review, Nguyen (2020) explores the intricate relationship between religion, culture, and mental health among racial and ethnic minority populations, emphasizing how deeply intertwined these elements are with personal and communal wellbeing. The study underscores the profound role that religious and spiritual practices often play in bolstering mental health resilience, especially in communities where these practices are woven into the fabric of cultural identity. Nguyen points out that for many individuals within these communities, religious and spiritual beliefs provide a source of strength and coping in facing life's challenges. These beliefs can offer a buffer against the psychological stress associated with experiences of racism, discrimination, or socio-economic adversity often faced by minority groups. For example, prayer, meditation, community worship, and spiritual rituals can serve as therapeutic practices that help individuals manage stress, find meaning in adversity, and maintain a sense of control and hope.

Moreover, Nguyen's research highlights the critical importance of cultural competence in mental health service provision. She argues that mental health professionals must be acutely aware of and sensitive to the cultural and religious contexts of their patients to provide effective care. This involves understanding the specific religious and spiritual values that might influence an individual's perception of mental illness and treatment. For instance, some cultures may view psychological issues as spiritual matters rather than medical ones, which can affect their willingness to seek and adhere to traditional mental health treatments.

However, the relationship between religion and mental health is not solely beneficial. The structures and expectations within some religious groups can also contribute to psychological distress. For some individuals, the pressures of conforming to community expectations and the fear of judgment from both divine and human authorities can lead to significant anxiety. Furthermore, religious doctrines that emphasize concepts such as sin and moral failing can lead to feelings of guilt and unworthiness, particularly if individuals internalize these beliefs to an extent that they feel perpetually inadequate or sinful. This aspect of religious involvement can exacerbate mental health issues like depression and especially in highly conservative anxiety, communities where deviations from the norm may be stigmatized (Koenig & Larson, 2001).

This paradoxical nature of religion's impact on mental health underscores the importance of a nuanced approach in pastoral care and religious counseling. It is crucial for religious leaders and caregivers to be aware of the potential for both positive and negative mental health outcomes associated with religious practice. They must strive to create environments where positive aspects such as community support, ethical living, and spiritual fulfillment are emphasized, while also being vigilant against and responsive to the ways in which religious life can contribute to mental strain or emotional conflict.

A comprehensive resource that delves into the multifaceted ways in which religion impacts mental health is presented in the "Handbook of Religion and Mental Health" by Duke University Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and founding Co-Director of Duke's Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health Dr. Harold G. Koenig. This book is a comprehensive resource that delves into the multifaceted ways in which religion impacts mental health. The handbook compiles a wide array of research findings that explore how religious involvement contributes to mental well-being. It discusses how faith communities provide vital social support, which can be particularly beneficial during times of stress or grief. Additionally, religious practices often offer coping mechanisms that help individuals process and deal with various life challenges, contributing to resilience and a reduced incidence of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.

However, Koenig's handbook also explores the darker side of this relationship, where excessive religious scrupulosity or conflict between personal beliefs and communal doctrines can lead to increased anxiety and guilt, potentially exacerbating mental health issues. This dual-edged nature of religion's impact on mental health underscores the complexity of its role, necessitating a balanced view in both scholarly research and clinical practice. The handbook serves not only as a guide for clinicians who wish to integrate religious considerations into their practice but also as a critical resource for researchers exploring the nuanced dynamics between faith and psychological well-being (Koenig, 1998).

Effective pastoral care should involve training for religious leaders in basic mental health awareness and counseling techniques that respect the religious context while also promoting psychological health. This includes recognizing the signs of mental health distress and knowing when to refer individuals to professional mental health services. Moreover, fostering open dialogues about mental health within religious settings can help demystify mental health issues and reduce stigma, encouraging a more accepting and supportive community environment, (Koenig & Larson, 2001).

Research conducted by noted American psychologist Gordon Allport in 1963 provides a foundational look at the complex interactions between behavioral science, religion, and mental health. While this research is quite old, it is still relevant, especially as the foundation of this triadic intersection as I discuss here. This study is particularly significant as it

addresses the myriad ways in which socio-economic and psychological stressors, compounded by insufficient societal frameworks, can adversely affect mental health. Allport's insights are critical in understanding how these stressors are not merely personal or isolated issues but are deeply embedded in the broader societal and economic systems. Allport contends that during times of economic recession or social upheaval, the incidence of mental health issues often increases dramatically. This surge can be attributed to a variety of stressors including job loss, financial insecurity, social isolation, and a general sense of uncertainty about the future. These stressors, while affecting the population at large, can have a more pronounced impact on vulnerable groups who might already be at risk due to preexisting economic or social disadvantages.

Within this context, religious communities frequently become essential support networks, offering both spiritual and practical assistance to those affected. Allport discusses how these communities can provide a sense of stability and belonging, helping individuals to navigate through the challenges posed by these stressors. For many, religious organizations offer more than spiritual guidance; they also provide direct support such as food banks, financial assistance, counseling services, and social activities that help maintain community ties and individual well- being during difficult times.

Moreover, Allport's research highlights the role of religious teachings in shaping individuals' responses to stress and adversity. Many religions promote values such as resilience, hope, and the importance of community support, which can play a crucial role in how individuals cope with stress. These teachings can encourage people to look beyond their immediate circumstances and find meaning and purpose even in the face of hardship, potentially mitigating the psychological impact of socioeconomic stressors.

The intricate connection between religion, spirituality, and mental health care is profoundly illustrated in recent research conducted by clinical

psychologists Vieten et al. (2023). In this study, Vieten provides a contemporary perspective by gathering insights from mental health professionals who frequently encounter the intersection of spirituality and clinical practice. The professionals highlight how patients' religious beliefs and spiritual practices often play a critical role in their overall mental health management. The results suggest that when therapists and counselors incorporate these spiritual elements into their therapeutic approaches, it not only respects and validates the patient's worldview but also enhances the therapeutic alliance. This integration can lead to improved patient engagement, increased treatment adherence, and overall better mental health outcomes.

The study also addresses practical aspects of such integrations, suggesting that mental health practitioners should receive training in spiritual competence to effectively and sensitively incorporate these dimensions into their practice. This approach acknowledges the diversity of spiritual expressions and the need for therapists to navigate this landscape with empathy and understanding.

Linking Sustainable Development Goals to Mental Health: Building Resilient Societal Structures

Expanding on Allport's foundation, it is evident that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address these very stressors by aiming to create more robust societal structures that can prevent such issues from escalating. For example, SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) are directly aimed at reducing the factors that lead to socioeconomic stress and improving mental health outcomes. By advocating for reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and stronger institutions (SDG 16), the SDGs recognize the necessity of creating supportive environments that can withstand economic and social pressures without compromising the mental health of the population.

Women and Religion in Practice: Examples of religious-based NGOs addressing women on the ground

A considerable number of organizations promote health education and mental health awareness, particularly in underserved areas worldwide. This section of this paper presents examples of such organizations with broad reach serving large populations. These organizations also address economic policies and empowerment. They were selected to be presented here because they are women-led and also to represent diverse religious orientations. Further, of interest, their initiatives are thorough and even if unintentional, address the pressing issues highlighted by SDGs.

• The Catholic Women's League is an organization headquartered in the Philippines. The organization has established itself as a vital force in promoting health education and mental health awareness, particularly in underserved rural areas. Driven predominantly by women, the organization leverages its extensive network to conduct health missions that are critical in areas where healthcare services are limited. These missions typically include a variety of health screenings which are essential for early detection of common health issues that, if unaddressed, can lead to serious conditions.

In addition to physical health screenings, the League places a strong emphasis on mental health through organized talks and interactive workshops. These sessions aim to educate community members about the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, strategies for managing stress, and the importance of emotional well-being. By demystifying mental health topics, the league helps to reduce stigma and promote a more open conversation about mental health in these communities.

The workshops also provide practical advice on navigating the local healthcare system and information about resources available for those needing more specialized help. This holistic approach not only addresses immediate health concerns but

also builds a foundation for long- term health and well-being. Further, the Catholic Women's League often collaborates with local health professionals, NGOs, and other community-based organizations to enhance the impact of their initiatives. This collaboration ensures that the programs are wellsuited to the specific needs of the community and can have a sustainable impact.

- Islamic Relief another health-based initiative is Islamic Relief, an organization that provides women-led programs in countries like Pakistan and Jordan that focus on mental health by providing psychological support to women affected by domestic violence and conflict. These programs not only offer direct services but also work to reduce the stigma around seeking mental health care in conservative societies.
- **Tostan,** an NGO based in Senegal, is renowned for its innovative approach to community engagement and empowerment through its Community Empowerment Program (CEP). This program, which heavily incorporates Islamic teachings that resonate with local values, has been especially transformative in the way it involves women as both participants and leaders. By focusing on human rights education and skills training, Tostan has enabled women to become key agents of change within their communities.

The CEP includes a comprehensive curriculum that covers topics such as human rights, health, education, and economic empowerment. These sessions are not only informative but also interactive, encouraging participants to discuss and reflect on how these issues affect their personal lives and communities. This approach helps break down complex concepts into relatable and actionable ideas that participants can apply in their daily lives.

Women leaders emerging from the Tostan program have been pivotal in challenging and changing

social norms. For instance, they have led communitywide discussions on sensitive topics like female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), child marriage, and domestic violence, all of which are deeply entrenched practices. By using the knowledge gained from the program, these women have been able to advocate for the abandonment of harmful practices and promote healthier, more equitable community norms. Moreover, the program's focus on skills training includes financial literacy, business management, and sustainable agriculture practices. These skills are crucial for fostering economic independence among women, enabling them to start and manage their own businesses or improve their agricultural practices. Economic independence is closely linked to improvements in mental health, as it alleviates stress and anxiety related to financial instability and increases women's agency in their households and communities.

The success of Tostan's approach in Senegal highlights the potential of culturally adapted education programs to empower women and transform communities. The integration of local religious and cultural values in the curriculum helps ensure the program's acceptance and effectiveness, making it a model for similar initiatives in other regions.

Jewish Women International (JWI), similarly to Tostan, has developed impactful programs focused on economic empowerment for women, particularly in the realm of entrepreneurship. Through a variety of workshops and resources, JWI provides women with the essential skills needed to launch and sustain their own businesses. These programs cover critical areas such as business planning, financial literacy, marketing strategies, and legal compliance, ensuring that women are well-prepared to enter and compete in the marketplace. The significance of these programs extends beyond mere business success; they play a crucial role in enhancing participants' mental health. By fostering economic independence, these

initiatives boost women's self-esteem and sense of autonomy, which are fundamental to mental well-being. Financial autonomy not only relieves stress associated with economic dependency but also empowers women to make independent decisions that affect their lives and families positively.

 Soroptimist International stands out as a beacon of empowerment through its extensive educational initiatives, aimed specifically at uplifting girls and young women globally. Rooted in Christian values of service and compassion, this organization harnesses the power of education to transform lives, not only by providing scholarships but also through comprehensive life skills training. These programs are meticulously designed to equip young women with the necessary skills to navigate and excel in the modern world.

The educational outreach conducted by Soroptimist International encompasses a wide range of subjects, including financial literacy, health and wellness, and leadership skills. By focusing on these areas, the organization ensures that participants are not just academically prepared but are also well-rounded individuals capable of making informed decisions and taking active roles in their communities. This holistic approach to education is crucial as it enhances participants' self-confidence and mental resilience, key components of mental health.

Importantly, the scholarships offered by Soroptimist International alleviate the financial barriers that often prevent talented young women from pursuing higher education. By reducing the stress associated with funding education, these scholarships contribute significantly to the mental well-being of the recipients. The security of having financial support allows these young women to focus on their studies and personal development without the looming worry of financial strain. The Hindu Women's Network, active in India, focuses on educating women about their rights and health issues, including mental health. These educational programs empower women to take charge of their health and advocate for better services in their communities.The organization focuses on three core values: Shakti (empowerment), Seva (service), and Sadhana (spiritual practice), and seeks to create a vibrant national network of Hindu women in America to foster communication and collaboration in service to society.

HWN organizes a variety of activities, including educational workshops, cultural events, and social service projects. These events provide women with platforms to discuss important issues such as mental health, domestic abuse, and financial independence, while also offering practical advice on topics like self-defense, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

Discussion

The exploration of the roles of women within religious contexts, particularly within Christianity, has provided significant insights into how these roles intersect with broader societal and mental health issues, framed within the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The comprehensive analysis throughout this paper underscores the dual nature of religion as both a supportive network and a potential source of conflict, especially in the context of mental health and gender dynamics.

One of the critical themes that emerged is the empowerment of women through religious platforms, which both enhances their personal and community well-being and propels the advancement of global health and gender equality initiatives. Programs led by organizations like the Catholic Women's League in the Philippines and Jewish Women International demonstrate the potent role religious organizations can play in promoting mental health and economic independence among women. These initiatives not only address immediate health and economic needs but also contribute to long-

term societal change by challenging and reshaping traditional gender roles within their communities.

However, this review also highlights the complexity of integrating religious doctrines with modern health and social practices. While many religious communities have taken progressive steps towards inclusive practices, challenges remain, particularly in areas with stringent traditional beliefs. The balance between respecting religious traditions and advocating for progressive changes that enhance women's roles and mental health is delicate and requires nuanced approaches. The role of education and leadership training, as showcased by Soroptimist International and Tostan, emphasizes the importance of providing skills and knowledge that empower women beyond the religious sphere, preparing them for broader societal participation. These educational initiatives are crucial for fostering a generation of women who are not only well-versed in their rights and health but are also equipped to take on leadership roles in various sectors.

This role of religious organizations is especially vital in areas and situations of crisis and disaster where government response may be delayed or insufficient. In many developing countries, where mental health services are scarce and often stigmatized, religious leaders and institutions step in to fill the void, providing direct support and also advocating for better mental health care and policy reforms. By doing so, they play a critical role in both immediate disaster response and in the longer-term recovery process, helping to rebuild not just physical infrastructures but also community morale and mental well-being.

Conclusion

This review reveals that while significant strides have been made in harnessing religious platforms for the empowerment of women and the advancement of mental health and SDGs, work still remains to be done. The interplay between religious beliefs and societal norms presents both opportunities and obstacles in the pursuit of gender equality and mental health improvement. Thus, for future efforts, it is recommended that religious organizations continue to expand their roles as advocates for mental health and gender equality, ensuring that their initiatives are inclusive and culturally sensitive. Additionally, more scientific research is needed to explore effective strategies for integrating religious teachings with contemporary health and social practices to maximize the positive impact on women's mental health and societal roles, and to establish best practices in programs.

Ultimately, the commitment of religious communities to address global challenges through the empowerment of women, as promoted by the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, will be crucial in shaping healthier, more equitable societies. This review underscores the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration among religious leaders, policymakers, and community stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of religious engagement reach all members of society, particularly women, who play pivotal roles in their communities.

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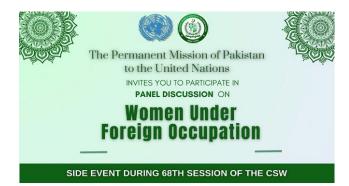
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Women Under Foreign Occupation: Panel at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Zeever Zahra Baqar



An event on the topic of "Women Under Foreign Occupation," was held during the 68th UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on March 18, 2024, sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations. The event brought together a diverse panel of speakers to discuss challenges faced by women living under occupation and to highlight the urgent need for action to protect and empower these women.

The aim was to address the critical disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls, as affirmed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognizes that women and girls under foreign occupation suffer inordinately from war, conflict, and violence (United Nations Security Council, 2000). The objective was specifically to raise awareness about the violations of fundamental rights faced by women in situations of foreign occupation, including sexual attacks, arrest and incarceration, denial of necessities, privacy intrusions, abduction and torture of children, trauma from security operations, and indiscriminate bombing of homes and places of refuge.

The event was held in person at the United Nations headquarters in New York City, in Conference Room 12, to a full audience of 129 people. As per the general guidelines for side events during CSW, it lasted an hour and fifteen minutes, in this case from 15:00-16:15. It was recorded by UN WebTV.



Overview of the event room

The event consisted for 3 segments: a high-level segment, three expert voices of diverse regions, and a discussion. It was moderated by Ms. Saima Saleem, a counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations in New York. She is the first visually impaired (blind) diplomat in the Pakistani Foreign Affairs office.



Looking towards the high-level speakers in the conference room

The High-Level Segment

The high-level segment consisted of statements from three Ambassadors to the United Nations:

Permanent Representative of Pakistan Ambassador Munir Akram; Permanent Representative of Algeria Ambassador Amar Benjama; and Ambassador Hameed A. Opeloyeru, the Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Ambassadors described various forms of violence, discrimination, and deprivation that women face daily, including sexual violence, forced displacement, and denial of fundamental rights such as education and healthcare. Consistent with their remarks, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), women and girls in conflict-affected areas are at "heightened risk of sexual" and gender-based violence, and their access to essential services is often severely limited (UNHCR, 2021).

The keynote speaker, His Excellency Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, set the stage for the discussion by emphasizing the disproportionate suffering of women and girls under foreign occupation and intervention.

Ambassador Akram has been a strong advocate for women's rights, particularly those living under foreign occupation. In a statement at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security in 2020, Ambassador Akram emphasized that "women in occupied territories, such as in Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine, suffer the most and are deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms" (Akram, 2020, para. 4). He further stressed the need for the international community to take action, stating that "the international community must hold the occupying powers accountable for their grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law" (Akram, 2020, para. 5).

Pakistan has co-sponsored several resolutions addressing the rights of women under foreign occupation. In 2020, Pakistan co-sponsored UN General Assembly Resolution 75/161, which "calls upon the occupying Power to cease all measures contrary to international law, as well as discriminatorylegislation, policies, and actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, that violate the human rights of the Palestinian people" (United Nations General Assembly, 2020, p. 4). The resolution also urges the international community to support Palestinian women through education, economic empowerment, and the promotion of their political participation. Similarly, in 2019, Pakistan cosponsored UN General Assembly Resolution 74/139, which "calls upon all States to take effective measures to prevent and respond to acts of violence against women and girls in humanitarian emergencies, including in occupied territories" (United Nations General Assembly, 2019, p. 5).

Ambassador Akram called for greater attention to this issue within global efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations General Assembly, 1979). He noted that "even in the ongoing discussions on the outcome of the current CSW session, there is, I believe, determined resistance to any reference to this issue," even though "the Security Council Resolution 1325 observed that women and girls under foreign occupation suffer disproportionately and inordinately from war, conflict, and violence" (Akram, 2023). Further, he expressed his hope "to draw some conclusions at the end of our discussions and to formulate a few recommendations for further action by the United Nations, and member states on ways and means to protect the fundamental rights of women and girls in situations of foreign and alien occupation" (Akram, 2023).

Next to speak in the high-level segment was H.E. Ambassador Amar Benjama, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Algeria to the United Nations, who has advocated for women's rights. During the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), Ambassador Benjama emphasized the importance of addressing the challenges faced by women in occupied territories,

stating that "the situation of women and girls living under foreign occupation remains a major concern"



H.E. Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations

(Benjama, 2021). He further highlighted Algeria's commitment to this cause, noting that "Algeria will continue to support the efforts of the international community to promote and protect the rights of women and girls living under foreign occupation" (Benjama, 2021). Ambassador Benjama has also actively participated in the adoption of U.N. resolutions aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women, such as the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (United Nations, 2000). Additionally, he has called attention to the specific vulnerabilities and human rights violations experienced by women under occupation, as evidenced by his statement during the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, where he urged the international community to «take concrete measures to ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls living under foreign occupation» (Benjama, 2020). Ambassador Benjama's unwavering commitment to this cause has positioned Algeria as a strong proponent of women's rights on the global stage, consistently urging the United Nations and its member states to prioritize the protection and advancement of women's rights, especially in regions affected by conflict and foreign occupation.

H.E. Benjama highlighted the role of Algerian women during the nation's struggle for independence. Calling these women "heroic," he highlighted the bravery and sacrifices of these women who faced brutal repression, imprisonment, torture, and sexual violence at the hands of the French occupying forces. "Algeria's history is intimately linked to the name of brave female freedom fighters and martyrs who are role models of courage and sacrifice" he said. "These women embody bravery, selflessness, and unwavering commitment serving as enduring sources of inspiration for a generation to come."

The Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) was marked by widespread human rights abuses against women, including rape and torture (Branche, 2001).



H.E. Ambassador Amar Bendjama, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Algeria to the UN

The third presentation in the high-level segment was by Ambassador Hameed A. Opeloyeru, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, who shed light on the historical discrimination faced by women and the impact of colonial domination on their rights. He stated, "In the past, the role of women and girls was limited to bearing and raising children with no legal rights whatsoever. This led to the exclusion of women and girls from enjoying political, economic, and social rights like the menfolk."

Ambassador Opeloyeru also highlighted the colonial responsibility for disrupting matrilineal

societies, asserting that "the colonial responsibility for the deliberate destruction of the kingship system of the indigenous societies was premised on the divide-and-rule policy of foreign powers." He further emphasized the OIC's efforts to address the mistreatment of women under foreign domination, citing the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAW) adopted in 2008, which "recognized the need for protection of women from all genderbased violence, including human trafficking and other harmful traditional practices against women and girls."

Drawing attention to the discriminatory practices in Indian illegally occupied Jammu Kashmir and the occupied Palestinian Territory, Ambassador Opeloyeru stated, "In this regard, the pitiable conditions of women and girls in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu Kashmir and the occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel is occasioned by the deliberate discriminatory practices of the occupying powers in these two non-self-governing territories."



Ambassador Hameed A. Opeloyeru, the Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

Panel of Expert Voices from the Field

The second segment of the event consisted of a panel of three expert voices: Mrs.Mishal Hussain Malik who spoke with regard to foreign occupation in Kashmir; Dr. Dalal Kanaan who spoke about the atrocities in Palestine; and Dr. Ameena Mohyuddin Zia who discussed foreign occupation in terms of leadership and empowerment.

The first speaker, Mrs. Mishal Hussain Malik, a human rights defender and wife of Kashmiri leader Yaseen Malik, shared her personal experience as a "victim of Indian brutality in" Kashmir. Due to safety reasons, she was unable to join the meeting in person and delivered her remarks by a pre-recorded message. She described the trauma and hardships faced by Kashmiri women, including what she called being a "half-widow" and being subjected to sexual harassment, and arbitrary detentions.

A "half-widow" is a woman whose husband has not died, but from whom she is separated by conditions outside their control.

"We are gifted with enormous titles of a half widow, where I haven't seen my husband for almost 10 years," she said, adding that, "In a marriage of 15 years, I've only spent 60 days with him. The rest have been jailed or we've been forcefully divided."

Ms. Malik emphasized the need for an end to the "violent disposition of the people of Kashmir."" She called for implementing international law and humanitarian law to hold oppressors accountable. Of note, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported on human rights violations in Kashmir, including sexual violence and enforced disappearances (OHCHR, 2018).



Mrs. Mishal Hussain Malik, a human rights defender (Image from SuchTV Pakistan).

Dr. Dalal Kanaan, a Palestinian-American professor, the second field expert panelist, provided a poignant testimony of the experiences of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation. She described how the occupation impacts every aspect of their lives, from freedom of movement to access to healthcare and education. "Israel's biased family reunification laws further exasperate the suffering of Palestinian women and their families," she said, adding that, "At the heart of the Israeli occupation lies a violent and deliberate strategy to evict women from their land and weaken the very fabric of Palestinian life.". She highlighted the systematic violations of women's rights in the occupied territories and the devastating effects of the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza, noting that "In the five months of this genocidal war, Israel has killed over 31,000 Palestinians, more than 70% of whom are women and children, and injured more than 73,000."

Of note, the United Nations has repeatedly expressed concern over the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the disproportionate impact on women and girls (United Nations General Assembly, 2021).



Palestinian-American professor Dr. Dalal Kanaan

The third field expert speaker was Dr. Ameena Mohyuddin Zia, an adjunct professor of political science and international studies at Virginia Tech University in the USA, who highlighted the challenges women face under foreign occupation in terms of their leadership and empowerment. She emphasized the need to reimagine the role of women and girls in leadership and participation, recognizing the barriers and power dynamics they face.

"Despite these recognized assertions based on research, based on peace negotiations, are a space that continues to cater to governments, delegates, and almost always men," Dr. Zia stated, citing her research showing women make up only a tiny percentage of negotiators, mediators, and signatories in major peace processes between 1992 and 2019. She expressed hope that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) discussions would inspire women advocates, leaders, and change agents to push for the necessary steps to protect the most vulnerable in their communities, particularly women and girls.



Professor Ameena Mohyuddin Zia (Image from Blue Ridge Impact Consulting)

The Discussion Period

In the discussion period, a confrontation emerged between representatives of countries, as described below in the quoted exchange.

A Moroccan Representative said: "My name is Majda Mouchouna. I'm Minister Counselor for the Kingdom of Morocco. Just to the point, since we don't have enough time: In his intervention, the Ambassador of Algeria mentioned the brave women, Moroccan women, from the Moroccan Sahara. Let me just reassure the Ambassador that the women in the Moroccan Sahara are enjoying their full human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indeed, the social development in the Moroccan Sahara is higher, the highest in North Africa. And they self-determine themselves on a daily basis, and actually they participate in the elections, and their participation, actually the percentage of their participation in elections, is the highest in the region, including higher than in Algeria, especially in Berjaya and northeast of Algeria, where a whole population is not able to express themselves in elections democratically. And so, just quickly again, Madam Coordinator, in spite of all that, let me come back to the statements of the Ambassador of Algeria and remind him of the following. Number one, he forgot, actually, that it was Morocco that provided arms, money, and medicines to the Algerian forces in its path towards independence.

Number two, he forgot to say that we cannot also fail the Kabylie women, Missa al-Khaba'i, Shujaat, who faced arrest, imprisonment, and rape, and forced exile to run away from all the violations they faced just because they aspired to self-determination. Does Algeria have the political courage to also talk about Kabylie women's self-determination? I doubt not. Three, he forgot to say that we cannot also fail the women and girls in the Tindou camps."

Algerian Representative: "The Sahrawi people exist. Everybody knows them. They are being occupied by your country, Morocco, the occupying state, for more than 50 years."

Moroccan Representative: "Unfortunately, [this event was] taken as a hostage by one panelist. And he is an expert. I thank God that I am in the United Nations. And I express myself everywhere. Because if I am to rely on the expert who just spoke, she clearly said in an event of other delegations, to leave the room. This is unacceptable."

Algerian **Representative**: "Sahrawi people belong to Sahrawi people. They are waiting for the organization of the referendum of selfdetermination that Morocco is putting obstacles to its organization since a long time, since 1991, where the settlement plan has been agreed by the two parties, Morocco as occupying state and the foreign side as representative of the Sahrawi people. Everybody knows this reality. Western Sahara is still on the agenda of the General Assembly. It is still one of the 17 non-self-governing territories. So denying the existence of Sahrawi women will not give you any advantage."

Moroccan Representative: "Foreign occupation, colonialism are only in the mindset of the Algerian delegation and the Algerian authorities. [...] If we go by the principle of equal treatment because Morocco and Sahara, I'm so happy, I just came from it. Everyone is having elections democratically observed by international observers. So we're fine. However, what about the Qabili women? Of Qabili. What about them? They do not have the right to self-determination. No. So we will be here to be the voice of the voiceless in every forum, in every time."

Algerian Representative: "I'm saying all regions of Algeria without any exception that have all participated in Algeria's revolution, in Algeria's independence, we are all being proud as Algerian women coming from all regions to be part of this independence, to be part of this struggle for our rights."

This (what emerged as heated) exchange between the Moroccan and Algeria representatives highlighted the ongoing dispute over the status of Western Sahara and the rights of the Sahrawi people. While the Algerian representative defended the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, the Moroccan representative accused Algeria of hijacking the event and denied the existence of the Sahrawi people as a separate entity. Of note,

the United Nations has recognized the right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination and has called for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (United Nations General Assembly, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Akram offered recommendations for action by the United Nations and Member States, to protect the rights of women under foreign occupation. These ere that:

- "All future UN reports and resolutions of the Security Council on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda should include provisions and information relating to the situation of women and girls under foreign occupation"
- "The Secretary General's Special Rapporteur on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict Network, and the team of experts on the rule of law and sexual violence in conflict should cover and include reviews and recommendations on the conditions of women in situations of foreign occupation"
- "An annual report from the UN Secretary General on all reported violations of the rights of women and girls under foreign occupation should be produced"

He also called for:

- "A more vigorous effort to end the current situations of foreign occupation and intervention, particularly in Gaza and Kashmir"
- "Greater involvement of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and their participation in policy formulation"
- "Urgent humanitarian and other efforts to provide relief and assistance, including food, medicines, and medical services, to women living under foreign occupation"
- The creation of "a UN monitoring mechanism [...] to register all crimes and violations against women and girls under foreign occupation"
- The UN "to establish mechanisms [...] to ensure accountability for sexual violence and other crimes against women and girls by occupation forces"

 "Further elaboration of international and human rights and humanitarian law and norms to enlarge the protection of women under foreign occupation, including possibly an additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions or an appropriate Security Council resolution"

These recommendations align with the United Nations' Women, Peace, and Security agenda, which promotes women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding (United Nations Security Council, 2019).

The moderator Ms. Saima Saleem then concluded the event by thanking all the Excellencies, distinguished panelists, and guests for attending the event.

Author's overall conclusion:

The event on "Women Under Foreign Occupation" provided a platform for raising awareness about the plight of women living under foreign occupation and the urgent need for action to protect their rights and promote their empowerment. It also highlighted the complex political and legal challenges in addressing these issues, particularly in contested sovereignty and long-standing conflicts. As the international community continues to work towards the full realization of women's rights and gender equality, it is crucial that the voices and experiences of women living under foreign occupation are heard and that their specific needs and challenges are addressed.

EVENT OVERVIEW:

TITLE: WOMEN UNDER FOREIGN OCCUPATION CONFERENCE: COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, 68TH SESSION

Date/Time: Monday, 18 March 2024

Location: United Nations Headquarters, New York City

Moderator: Mrs. Saima Saleem (Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, New York)

Panelists: H.E. Munir Akram, (Ambassador, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations); H.E Amar Benjama (Ambassador, Algeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations); Dr. Dalal Kanan (Professor at Fordham University), Dr. Ameena M. Zia (Professor at City University of New York-Herbert H. Lehman College); and Mishal Hussain Malik (human rights defender).

Recording available at: <u>https://webtv.un.org/en/</u> <u>asset/k1y/k1ybeinqcu</u>

Personal Reflections

As an American-Pakistani woman working with the Pakistani Mission to the United Nations and having founded two organizations in Pakistan that support women from marginalized communities, the topic of this event, on "Women Under Foreign Occupation," is profoundly personal and vital to me.

Growing up in a Pakistani household in the United States, I was always aware of the challenges faced by women in my ancestral homeland. The stories of resilience and courage in the face of adversity that I heard from my mother, grandmother, and other female relatives inspired me to dedicate my career to advocating for women's rights and empowerment. Now working with the Pakistani Mission to the UN has provided me with a unique platform to bring attention to the plight of women living under foreign occupation, particularly in the context of the longstanding dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. As a member of the global community, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of conflict and occupation on women and girls, who often bear the brunt of violence, discrimination, and displacement.

The side event on "Women Under Foreign Occupation" resonated with me profoundly. It brought together voices from different regions and contexts to shed light on the shared experiences of women living under occupation. Listening to the powerful testimonies of women from Algeria, Jammu-Kashmir, and Palestine, reinforced my conviction that the international community must do more to protect and empower women in these situations.

Given that the two organizations I founded in Pakistan work with marginalized women, I have seen the transformative power of education, economic empowerment, and social support in helping women overcome their challenges. However, I also recognize that these efforts must be accompanied by broader political and legal action to address the root causes of conflict and occupation.

The stories shared by the panelists at this event, particularly those of Mishal Hussain Malik and Dr. Dalal Kanaan, reminded me of the countless women I have met through my work in Pakistan who have faced similar experiences of violence, loss, and resilience. Their words underscored the urgent need for the international community to prioritize the voices and needs of women in conflict-affected areas and to work towards inclusive, sustainable peace processes that address the specific challenges faced by women under occupation.

Reflecting on the event and my own experiences, I am more committed than ever to using my position and platform to advocate for the rights of women living under foreign occupation. Whether through my work with the Pakistani mission, my organizations in Pakistan, or my advocacy, I believe that amplifying the voices of these women and working towards their empowerment is a moral imperative and essential for building a more just, peaceful, and equitable world.

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Author Bio

Reported by Zeever Zahra Bagar, M.A. who earned a Master's degree from the Department of International and Comparative Education at Columbia University Teachers College, where she was a student in Professor Dr. Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations and a researcher for the Global Advocacy and applied Psychology (GAAP) Lab headed by Professor Kuriansky. Further, she is a Member of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), an NGO in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. In addition to her academic work, she currently works with the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations on humanitarian and women's issues as well as other international topics. She is the co-founder of two organizations, Woh Ehsaas and The Bagar Foundation, both aimed at helping women and children from marginalized communities in Pakistan.

Understanding Masculinities to Dismantle Patriarchal Power Structures: A discussion on gender equity and beyond

Jinge Ren and Judy Kuriansky

When the words "gender" and "women" are mentioned in discussions about gender equity, how often do people think of involving men in the related realms?

Also, while the topic of gender equity, referred to in Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has been brought up increasingly in different contexts internationally, do we see actual improvements around the world?

These are questions that need more attention by all multi-stakeholders, including civil society, private sectors, and government.

This topic was examined at a conference on the topic of *"Understanding Masculinities to Dismantle Patriarchal Power Structures"*, hosted by the International Peace Institute (IPI) on 23 October 2023 in their conference room in the Church Center at the United Nations building, across the street from the United Nations headquarters in New York City.

An important foundation for the topic of discussion is the Policy Brief on *A New Agenda for Peace* put forth by the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in July 2023, which encourages United Nations Member States (governments) to work towards "dismantling patriarchal power systems" that is crucial to realize gender equality (International Peace Institute, 2023; United Nations, 2023).

The discussion further was aligned with the United Nations Security Council open debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), (United Nations Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, n.d.).

It was further intended to address the policy brief of the UN Secretary-General, "A New Agenda for Peace" outlining a vision for multilateral efforts for peace and security with twelve proposals for action, in five priority areas (United Nations, 2023).

Consideration about masculinities clearly impacts the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls called for in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, widely considered to be lagging in its achievement.



UN Agenda 2030 Goal 5 is not on track

For the event, IPI joined with the New Lines Institute for Strategy and Peace, a nonprofit and nonpartisan think tank in Washington D.C. working to enhance U.S. foreign policy based on understanding geopolitics of different world regions (New Lines Institute, n.d.) and Equimundo, the Center for Masculinities and Social Justice that engages men and boys in partnership with women, girls, and individuals of all gender identities in order to achieve gender equality and prevent violence.

IPI is an independent, non-profit organization working to strengthen inclusive multilateralism for a more peaceful and sustainable planet, which provides innovative recommendations and solutions for solving the world's most pressing problems, for the United Nations System, member states, regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector through research, convening, and strategic advising (IPI, n.d.). As commonly in their events, discussants

are multi-stakeholder representatives, from UN Member States, UN agencies, and civil society, brought together to discuss matters of exceptional importance to their world; in this case, sharing ideas about how "masculinities" can impede or facilitate, gender equity (Equimundo, n.d.).

These organizations all have scope on gender issues based through different lenses and societal perspectives.

This was not the first time that IPI addressed the issue of masculinities. In June 2022, IPI published a policy report on the role masculinities play within extremism and counterterrorism in partnership with the United Nations Security Council Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) (Dier & Baldwin, 2022) and later that year followed up by cohosting a policy forum on the topic of "Masculinities in Peace and Security" (IPI, 2022).

Specifics of the present event

The present event was moderated by Phoebe Donnelly, Senior Fellow and head of the Women, Peace, and Security Programat IPI. The format was that Ms. Donnelly posed a question on the topic to each of the panelists.



IPI's Phoebe Donnelly moderating the panel

The panelists were:

• Her Excellency Arlene B. Tickner, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Mission of Colombia to the United Nations

- Kat Fotovat, Principal Deputy Director of the Office of Global Women's Issues in the U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC.
- Gary Barker, President and CEO of Equimundo Center for Masculinities and Social Justice
- Sarah Douglas, Deputy Chief of UN Women, the UN Agency which delivers programs, policies and standards that uphold women's human rights
- Emily Prey, Director of the Gender Policy Portfolio at New Lines Institute
- Dean Peacock, Director of the Mobilizing Men for Feminist Peace Initiative at WILPF, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a feminist peacebuilding organization headquartered in Geneva.



Panelists at the event

Opening Address

The opening address was given by Mr. Adam Lupel, Vice President and COO of IPI. He pointed out the critical time of this discussion, in anticipation of the annual United Nations Security Council open debate on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) taking place on Wednesday of the same week. Specifically, the Secretary-General's call for dismantling patriarchal power structures, in his policy brief, involves men and boys as well as women and girls. He emphasized the need for honest analysis of the social norms and practices related to patriarchy, which requires a better

understanding of masculinity. He pointed out that IPI research has shown that gender-based violence and abusive masculinities are not often deviant but tragically normative in patriarchal structures. He ended his address by saying that while finding the current situation of gender equality chilling in face of all so many challenges, he also feels "strangely hopeful" because of the potential of transformative approaches to understand masculinity.



IPI conference room for the event



Adam Lupel, Vice President and COO of IPI

Then, moderator Dr. Phoebe Donnelly proceeded to ask questions to the panelists one at a time.

Questions to Panelists First panelist

The first question was to H.E. Arlene B. Tickner, Deputy Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations.



H.E. Arlene B. Tickner, Deputy Permanent Representative of the UN Mission of Colombia

Q: "How does analyzing masculinity support UN Member States in implementing the Secretary General's recommendation in the new agenda for peace policy brief to dismantle the patriarchy?"

A: Ambassador Tickner started her answer by acknowledging the UN Secretary General's "New Agenda for Peace" policy brief.

She made three major points:

- The Secretary General's brief's calls for "dismantling of patriarchal power structures", which must be clearly and properly defined.
- Misogyny is an important part of narratives that justify non-conflict-related violence prevalent around the world.
- Patriarchy and gendered power dynamics are associated with the oppression of not only all women and girls but also with harm men and boys.

We are facing "a sober reminder" of the challenges to undo patriarchy, she said, as indicated by lagging progress on the SDG Goal in the UN 2030 agenda related to women and girls, and the backsliding on certain rights, including sexual and reproductive

health, and reversals even in agreed-upon language within the context of the United Nations on matters related to gender-based sexual violence.

Yet, she emphasized -- in answer to the posed question -- it is impossible to dismantle anything, in this case patriarchy, until we fully understand what it is. She boldly pointed out that the new Agenda for Peace policy brief fails to define its terms clearly.

Thus, she posed definitions of two terms: patriarchy and masculinity.

First, patriarchy, she said, is "a social political system rooted in socially defined gender roles that operates to create both oppression and privilege." Patriarchy insists that certain people, particularly men who are heteronormative and white -- are naturally superior to those deemed weak, specifically females and including transwomen. Also, patriarchs assume that they have the inherent right to dominate and rule through distinct forms of power and violence.

Patriarchy manifests itself in social spaces in the home, at school, in the workplace, in places of worship by the law, by States and by extension, by international organizations such as the UN.

Second, she defined masculinity as "the socially determined and power infused roles that men and boys play and the multiple dimensions in which this power operates in society".

Masculinity even entails persons who face other structural conditions, such as racism, capitalism, homophobia, transphobia and others, that make these practices untenable.

She suggested that we are not only talking about dominant men who engage in specific social practices and routines, but which other men repeat, even if they cannot apply the practices associated with dominant masculinity.

She also introduced other terms. These include: "hegemonic masculinity," a term first coined by Raewyn Connell, an American writer and LGBTQ activist, that is defined as a practice that enables the legitimacy of men's dominant position in society and "justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man" ("Hegemonic masculinity", n.d.; Scott & Marshall, 2015; Connell, 2005). Different vulnerable groups of men and boys who are prevented from achieving hegemonic masculinity due to structural barriers are nonetheless socialized to uphold dominant group norms, thus reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy.

Other terms are "complicit masculinities" that benefit from the social dominance of men, while not actively seeking to oppress women. And, "marginalized masculinity" which refers to the interaction between hierarchies of gender and other factors such as socioeconomic status and race, which leads to a harmful social power structure.

Women are also active participants in these processes, she pointed out.

Capitalism and colonialism also play a role, by establishing both gender and race as organizational categories to place peoples and cultures along a hierarchy of social and economic worth and power, that has been operated historically to reinforce subjugation and inequality. Thus, the provocation to dismantle patriarchy and to envision masculinity differently may demand that we engage with racialized capitalist heteronormative structures and logics.

In wrapping up, H.E. Tickner summarized with two points:

1)Both patriarchy and masculinity are performative and participatory. The performativity of gender echoes the performativity of patriarchy. By this, she meant that they are both continuously recreated through gendered acts in which most people participate; thus, they can't be wished away simply with the mind.

The above masculinities can be replaced, she offered, by "feminist masculinity" and "non-patriarchal masculinity".

2)An intersectional lens that underscores interconnected and overlapping forms of subjugation is needed to foster genuine conversations with, and links between, distinct groups and situations of vulnerability rooted in gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, disability and others.

We need to combat racism and rethink capitalism, she said, in ways which are conducive to reducing inequality, oppression and violence against both humans and nonhumans which refer to the environment among others.

Second panelist

The moderator addressed the next question to Kat Fotovat, Principal Deputy Director, Office of Global Women's Issues, U.S. Department of State, to explain the U.S. government's positions on these issues.

Q: "What policies or programs has the US Office of Global Women's Issues put in place to begin the long process of dismantling patriarchal norms?"

A: Ms. Fotovat answered the question by saying they are trying everything Ambassador Tickner has just mentioned. She made clear that the U.S. has recognized patriarchy and the roles of masculinities and femininities, by operating through a gendered approach and having a national gender strategy. It is important to acknowledge, she pointed out, that since most institutions were founded and designed by men, they are rooted in, and continue to be resourced and promote, patriarchal norms.

She quoted the Barbie movie, "They still do patriarchy, they just hide it better".

But, she says, by pulling it out into the open and by talking about it, we are able to more effectively combat it.

Often institutions rooted in patriarchy are most comfortable discussing gender-based violence but only on the surface level, because it maintains patriarchal understandings of gender, namely, that men are protectors and women need to be protected. Therefore oftentimes, women and girls are painted merely as victims of conflict.



Kat Fotovat, U.S. Department of State Office of Global Women's Issues

It is important, Fotovat pointed out, to include gender analysis in decision-making processes. The U.S. government has been trying to have the voices of women who are the most affected engage with policymakers.

On another hand, internal training of the infrastructure is needed. Fotovat emphasized that the Department is trying to work on everything from security to economics to make sure everyone understands the importance of a gendered approach.

Next, the moderator addressed a question to Gary Barker, President and CEO, Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, on how to engage men and boys more in the issue of dismantling patriarchy.

Q: "What are the most effective ways to engage men and boys in conversations on patriarchal norms and harmful masculinities where do you see the most resistance?"

Mr. Barker started with an example he encountered recently in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, a country with about 80% of the population

composed of immigrant workers, including many men from South Asia. These men migrate to the UAE to earn money to end back home, and thus, who live up to the version of masculinity that requires men to provide for their families.

In this case, the overlap between patriarchy and capitalism is clear, Barker said.

He also mentioned the example of men going to war in Ukraine, being paid about US\$750 a month, also as a necessity to provide for their families.

Both examples, he said, speak to men's very complex relationships with power and patriarchy.



Gary Barker, Equimundo President and CEO

A study by Equimundo (his organization) across nearly 60 countries over a 15-year period found that "the world is going backwards - young men are less likely to believe in the cause of gender equality that people have been championing for all these years".

Thus, an important question to ask, he said, is which men are more likely to support, and which are more likely to resist, the effort of enhancing gender equality. A driving issue for this answer is the perceived economic precarity, especially for economically marginalized men.

When it comes to the practical work we can do to change the status quo, Barker said, a lot of small

scale work is very effective, but there is the huge challenge of scaling up.

Nevertheless, he said, promising advances have been observed in a few places like schools and health systems.

He brought up an interesting and powerful anecdote at the end of his speech. During his visit to his daughter's middle school, after his giving a talk about how gender norms and masculinities affect men, and giving an example of men's life expectancy compared to women due to social rather than biological factors, a boy wrote him a letter saying "Thanking you for sharing these examples of how men are also affected by patriarchal and harmful ideas about masculinities, but now I'm worried about dying". Such an interaction, he said, shows an effective way of engaging men and boys is to convince them they could benefit from the process of dismantling patriarchy and enhancing gender equality.

"As I cringe hearing that", Barker commented, "we need to help men see our stake in this more equitable future, to feel it and to understand it in our own health and well-being, to understand how it affects our relationships and to see how can we be inspired by the political feminism, in the world to be allies for it."

Third panelist

The moderator then proceeded to address a question to Sarah Douglas, Deputy Chief of UN Women, who discussed what the UN agency charged with addressing women's issues is doing on the issue of enhancing gender equality.

Q: "Why is addressing masculinities important for UN women's work?"

A: Ms. Douglas started her answer by acknowledging the annual report of UN Women about Women, Peace and Security which contains alarming statistics of negative trends about peace and security in the world. These statistics, include that last year marked

the eighth consecutive year in a row that global military expenditure broke all boundaries and raised to a level of US\$2.2 trillion, while at the same time the number of women and girls living in conflict increased 50% since the year 2017, and funds to women's organizations in conflict zones decreased.



Sarah Douglas, Deputy Chief of UN Women

She addressed the "why" in the posed question by stating that male-dominated approaches to peace and security as well as to development and governance, have enabled the current state of the world. She quoted from noted feminist activist Gloria Steinem that "sexism and patriarchy is the '-ism' that makes all other 'isms' possible because it is in the home when children first observe their mothers getting treated differently from their fathers".

Describing efforts of UN Women to change gender conditions around the world, Ms. Douglas mentioned their:

- work with the African Union on promoting "positive masculinity", referring to positive qualities historically defined under masculinity.
- 2) work with communities where the dissemination of information and national policies rely on local village Chiefs.

Much of the work that is being done widely is still in the realm of protection -- meaning the protection of women from men – while she a more considers two more productive route: engaging men as allies with women and increasing the participation and leadership of women.

She added that UN Women has not been able to convince male decisionmakers, who still feel giving up power or giving women power would be a threat to their own power.

Finally, she said the UN is still largely working on the micro level, while looking at transforming macro level structures is more needed.

Speakers provided their insight and suggestions on promoting advocacy, mobilizing political resources, developing education, securing funding, running research and analysis related to gender equality, masculinity and patriarchy, to accelerate the process of dismantling patriarchal systems.

Overall, the discussion raised critical issues and elucidated very fundamental but under-recognized concepts and dynamics that underscore, and also inhibit progress in achieving gender equity and that essentially constrain men from being fully able to participate in a more gender-equitable world that would in itself lead to more social progress.

Personal Reflections

As a young female learner who cares about gender inequality and related topics about masculinity and patriarchy, I found this discussion genuine and crucial as well as mind-opening. The panelists gave thoughtful remarks on what has been done in past years to promote gender equality and future directions, and openly talked about important challenges societies are facing. Multiple stakeholders were involved in the discussion, who were both female and male, from government, social organizations and the public, and who represent higher-level policy entities as well as on-the-ground constituencies. Different aspects of the topic were

brought up, ranging from capitalism to colonialism, from concepts like "hegemonic masculinity" to "complicit and marginalized masculinity", from "positive masculinity" to "transforming masculinity", and ranging on individual as well as systematic levels. I gained much knowledge and information from the discussion and was touched by the passion, rigor and determination demonstrated by the panelists who are actively involved in the process of improving contemporary issues of gender equity.

EVENT OVERVIEW

TITLE: Understanding Masculinities to Dismantle Patriarchal Power Structures

Date/Time: Monday, 23 October 2023, 1:00PM– 2:45PM EDT

Location: Trygve Lie Center for Peace, Security & Development

International Peace Institute 777 United Nations Plaza, 12th Floor New York City

Moderator: Phoebe Donnelly, Senior Fellow and Head of the Women, Peace, and Security Program, International Peace Institute

Welcoming Remarks: Adam Lupel, Vice President and COO, International Peace Institute Panelists:

H.E. Arlene B. Tickner, Deputy Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations Kat Fotovat, Principal Deputy Director, Office of Global Women's Issues, U.S. Department of State Gary Barker, President and CEO, Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice

Sarah Douglas, Deputy Chief of UN Women **Emily Prey**, Director of the Gender Policy Portfolio at New Lines Institute

Dean Peacock, Director of the Mobilizing Men for Feminist Peace Initiative, WILPF (virtual)

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Author Bios

Jinge Ren, a masters-level non-degree student in the Department of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University Teachers College, and a student in Professor Judy Kuriansky's class on "Psychology and the United Nations." In addition, she is a full-time research support staff at Columbia University's Psychology Department and lab manager at the Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Lab. She is interested in psychotherapy, gender equity and its culture variance.

Dr. Judy Kuriansky, Professor of Psychology and Education, Columbia University Teachers College; Advisor, Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations; Policy Advisor to Ambassador Sidique Wai Chief of Mission of the embassy of Sierra Leone to the United States; and representative of the International Association of Applied Psychology in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. An active advocate on behalf of women and girls, she has organized innumerable events and conferences including during the UN Commission on the Status of Women; spoken widely about SDG5; supported the #HandsOffOurGirls project of the First Lady of Sierra Leone Fatima Maada Bio; co-developed a Girls Empowerment Camp; and written extensively about the empowerment of women and girls including a co-edited book about "Women's Evolving Lives: Global and Psychosocial Perspectives"

Gender disparity and post-natural disaster: Overview and the case of men and boys after the 2004 Indian

Ocean Tsunami in Sri Lanka

Judy Kuriansky^{1,2}, Ayesha Liaqat¹ and Agnes Reed¹

Natural disasters have a profound impact on people, families, communities, and societies in terms of their psychological as well as physical and economic state. In the field of post-disaster response, more focus of researchers and practitioners has been on the coping and rehabilitation of women and children compared to men. Yet, men face considerable as well as distinctive responses to natural disaster that deserve attention in order to address their needs and to insure recovery of their familial and social circle. Factors affecting males include prevailing gender stereotypes, norms, and cultural traditions that need to be taken into account in planning interventions for boys and men, and especially fathers.

This paper presents an overview of research and reports related to the emotional needs of men post-disaster and details a specific example of an intervention conducted by the first author during a mission carried out by international psychologists after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in a remote community in Sri Lanka to provide psychosocial support and resilience-building for survivors. Recommendations are offered for closing the gender gap in post-disaster interventions, including that more evidence-based research is warranted about men post-disaster since their coping affects the familial, community and social system.

Overview

The aftermath of a natural disaster has psychosocial effects on all population groups (Carballo et al., 2005), however, a predominant number of studies on post-disaster response focus on the impact, outcome and coping of women and/or children (Drolet et al., 2013; Horton, 2012; IFRC, 2017; Lazarus et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2011; Oxfam International, 2005; Rees et al., 2006; UNDP, 2010; Wickrama

& Kaspar, 2007; WHO, 2002). A review of literature (Fajarwati et al, 2020) showed that of 21 studies over the years 2011 to 2020, the considerable majority (N=14, or 2/3) highlighted women and only one-third addressed both genders, which the authors attributed to the higher vulnerability of women to natural hazards.

Consistent with this, an overview of approaches by agencies following the 2004 tsunami in the Maldives found either a gender-blind approach ignoring differential impacts on men and women in relief and recovery efforts, or more attention paid to the concept of the vulnerable woman requiring special assistance while ignoring men's vulnerabilities (Fulu, 2007).

Studies have pointed out risk factors for widows for poor mental health and PTSD (Zhang et al., 2012). Women face escalated gender-based inequalities and vulnerabilities including lack of access to relief money and supplies as well as being subject to postdisaster gender-based violence and abuse (Felten-Biermann, 2006; IFRC, 2017).

Studies that examine differential gender challenges overwhelmingly show that women compared to men are at higher risk of survival and experience higher rates of stress and PTSD (Yazawa et al., 2022). In fact, women constituted 70% of the 230,000 fatalities in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (Okai, 2022), 61% in Myanmar after the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, and 91% after the 1991 Cyclone Gorky in Bangladesh (CDP, n.d.). Economic challenges for women have also been pointed out (Enarson, 2000).

Regarding gender differences, females have been shown to experience both general stress and posttraumatic stress more than males (Wahlström et al.,

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2008). In a study of 158 tsunami survivors (Pyari et al., 2012), results showed that women had a 6.35 times higher risk of having PTSD compared to men. Consistent with this, another study found that women used more emotion-focused coping compared to men who were found to have more emotionally inhibiting coping styles (Matud, 2004). An extensive report showed that women are in general more vulnerable than men in innumerable dimensions, including with respect to losses and threats to wealth and health (Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013).

In a study of 184 subjects (79 males and 105 females) who used a psychiatric service interviewed after a 1999 earthquake in Turkey, women had higher mean scores for PTSD than men, scored higher on the Beck Depression Inventory and the Beck Hopelessness Scale than men, and had significantly higher depression, anxiety and somatization subscale scores than men (Aksaray et al., 2006). The researchers concluded that these findings indicate that women may experience more severe psychological reactions than men after a disastrous earthquake.

In another study of gender responses, 211 subjects (108 men and 103 women) completed two standardized stress measures (the Impact of Events scale and the Symptom checklist-90R) and answered open-ended questions regarding their experience of the Loma Prieta earthquake (Anderson & Manuel, 1994). Results showed that women clearly reported experiencing greater amounts of stress and estimated that the earthquake lasted significantly longer than did men. These results are explained by the greater acceptance in our society for women to express emotions, particularly stress-related emotions.

A growing body of literature and anecdotes highlight the importance of understanding strengths and challenges for men facing disaster (Enarson & Pease, 2016; Rushton et al., 2020). While men have been seen to have a better outcome in recovery compared to women in terms of some factors, including safety (ability to escape and withstand external climate threats), economics (ability to find other work and replace financial loss) and legal issues (property and land rights), men suffer disproportionately post-disaster with regard to their emotional needs which go unexpressed and unmet (Dominelli, 2020). Unable to fulfill their expected roles as protector and provider for their family, men worry about lack of employment; are more vulnerable to long-term psychosocial challenges; and have fewer social support structures than women when such support has been shown extensively by research to be helpful in coping with crisis. Also, men are especially at risk for post-disaster of substance dependency on alcohol and other drugs (Makwana, 2019).

This paradigm can lead to marginalizing men in their experience of grief and loss, which leads to risk of their developing guilt, shame, depression, social withdrawal or aggression, and sometimes violence. Cultural sanction against men sharing emotional reactions to loss and grieving restricts acknowledging their experience, recognizing emotional fragility and psychological distress, receiving temporary exemption from daily roles (work and other activities) and being afforded needed support, care and interventions which women or children would receive. The emotional stoicism that can interfere with men's recovery would be stereotypically expected for fishermen in the heavily male-dominated society of South Asian fishing villages. Additionally, anecdotal reports point out that such fisherman suffer loss of trust in the sea, the very source of their life and livelihood.

The study of males and masculinity has received increased attention over recent years, in large part due to the establishment of a designated division within the American Psychological Association, the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity, dedicated to advancing knowledge in the psychology of men and boys through research, education, training, public policy, and improved clinical services (American Psychological Association, n.d.). This effort was spearheaded by psychologist Ronald Levant, a past APA President well known for

his pioneering work in the psychology of boys and men, who developed the theory of normative male "alexithymia" referring to the concept that men are socialized to ignore much of their emotional lives except for a few stereotypic emotions such as anger and lust (Levant et al., 2009).

Socially and culturally, men are expected to deal with their losses on their own, leading to loneliness, isolation and other problems in accordance with the masculine grief hypothesis, a conceptual model referring to bereavement patterns of men that follow cultural norms and restrict emotionality (Doka, 1999; Zinner, 2000). As a result, gaps in men's coping capacities victimize them in the recovery process (Gender and Disasters Network, 2009). Even men who react emotionally may still not receive needed support, and instead be marginalized by not being legitimately acknowledged or their strengths not being recognized in coping strategies (Zinner, 2000).

Moreover, reduced help-seeking behaviors among men with medical and psychological issues has been documented (Yousaf et al., 2015) that perpetuates men's post-disaster struggles and further indicates the importance of psychological assistance and social support for their recovery. Help-seeking in the Asian context is impeded in cultures where seeking mental health services is already stigmatized (Tavkar et al., 2012). This stigma, combined with masculine norms that already inhibit help-seeking behavior, and the fact that risky or 'heroic' action is encouraged during the search and rescue period, debris removal, and reconstruction, altogether deters men from approaching relief agencies or seeking counseling (Enarson, 2000).

One study exposed an intervening variable in post-disaster gender response differences (Heir & Weisaeth, 2008). In exploring the relationship of responses to the intensity of the danger and acute exposure, the researchers found that more distress of women compared to men disappeared with increasing intensity of exposure to danger.

Gender difference in young samples

Gender differences in posttraumatic stress symptoms following exposure to natural disaster have also been found in younger samples of children and adolescents. In a study of students who experienced a natural disaster or other trauma from violence or loss of a loved one, females reported more PTSD symptoms and more general psychopathology (Hetzel-Riggin & Roby, 2013). In another study, boys showed increased worry, anhedonia, concentration problems, and academic problems (Kronenberg et al, 2010). Gender differences were also found in a study of 512 high school students after a 2009 earthquake in Italy, revealing higher rates of PTSD in females than males (Dell'Osso et al., 2011). Developmental factors may differentially affect child youth reactions to disasters, as adolescent girls tend to develop earlier than boys which affects their emotional and cognitive expression.

Impact of fatherhood

Loss of a child is traumatic for a parent under any circumstances, but the pain is often escalated when witnessing the death of their child. Fathers witnessing the death of a child during a disaster such as the Asian tsunami, or being absent during the event, can experience exponential feelings of helplessness and guilt due to their expected masculine role as protector.

The pain of fathers losing their children is escalated when compounded by death of their wife. In some villages after the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, many men lost their wives as well as several children. While it has been proposed that both men and women suffer equal inconsolable anguish when losing children, grieving fathers can have particular difficulty expressing experiences of loss and bereavement in interpersonal or social spaces due to pressures maintaining gender-related roles and meeting gender-related expectations (Lebel, 2013).

Loss of a spouse is considered one of the most stressful life experiences, often associated with

declining mental or physical health of the widower, with relative levels of severity of physical or mental health issues affecting 25% of surviving spouses within the first year (Balkwell, 1981; Tudiver et al., 1992).

Moreover, as most post-disaster interventions target widows and female-headed households, the concerns and needs of widowers becoming the head of a single parent household and left with the responsibility of raising children, go unaddressed. Further, gender-based social conditioning that does not give men the necessary resources to develop skills in domestic chores and care giving, leaves newly single fathers having to make arrangements for raising children. Additionally, since receiving financial aid to care for the family is seen as a stigma (WHO, 2002), men confront an additional financial challenge. Overall, the personal loss combined with the destruction of their livelihoods increases the psychological impact of the disaster for fathers.

Details about the sharing of men and fathers in the group that the first author (subsequently referred to as "I') facilitated in Sri Lanka post-tsunami follow in this paper.

The Case of the 2004 Asian Tsunami: An intervention for men's trauma

On December 26, 2004, the world's fifth largest earthquake in a century hit Southern Asia, off the coast of Indonesia unleashing a tsunami tidal wave that devastated coastal regions including of Sri Lanka, India, and neighboring countries. With a magnitude of 9.1–9.3 and lasting up to 10 minutes, it was one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history, killing about 275,000 people in fourteen countries across two continents and flooding coastal communities with up to 98 foot high waves causing extensive displacement and destruction of buildings and seashores, and drastic ecological changes along shorelines and for water life (Shah, 2005). A worldwide humanitarian response ensued.

The post-disaster mission in Sri Lanka

Soon after the tragic event, I went with a team of psychologists and traumatologists from the Mental Health Outreach Project to the town of Batticaloa on the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka (Kalayjian, 2010). This area of the country was most hit by the tsunami, already suffering from years of civil war with rebel Tamil Tiger forces, and was more remote and underserved given difficulty to travel there as well as required use of the less-common language of Tamil compared to the Sinhala spoken in the capital city area (Kalayjian et al. 2010). Given demolished coastal areas and homes, people were commonly sheltering in converted schoolrooms.

Four times as many women than men were killed in the tsunami-affected areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India. Several cultural and gender-related factors have been posed for this disproportionate high death toll of women compared to men (Okfam International, 2005). In rural coastal areas, many fishermen were out at sea and survived since the waves passed under their small boats but hit the shore where they flattened coastal communities, killing women and children who would traditionally be home on a Sunday morning. Other men were away from the coastal homes, doing errands, working in the fields, or taking produce to markets. Also, women and mothers were more at risk from the raging waters because they ran too slowly or their sarong clothing got caught in debris preventing escape, or they - as well as young children - could not easily cling to or climb trees or fight the waves (MacDonald, 2005). Also in Sri Lanka, the tsunami hit at the time when women who lived on the coast usually bathed in the sea.

Since the tsunami hit on December 26 during the Christmas holiday, the trauma was especially intense. I have witnessed the aftermath of a natural disaster occurring during the Christmas season on other missions, including after an earthquake between Christmas and New Years in Newcastle, Australia, and in Haiti after the 2010 devastating earthquake not

long after the New Year (Kuriansky, 2012b). Sadness from the contrast to the celebratory season is tragic. Seeing the gift wrapping and children's toys still mired in the devastation was devastating to me.

The day of the tragic tsunami holds some symbolic significance, given that it occurred over Christmas, the holiday of supposed joy and gift-giving, and symbolic of the suffering of Christ. Despite the predominance of Hinduism in the region, some community members did recognize the significance of the date, evidenced by the exchanged children's gifts still visible in the rubble. As one man told me, a Christmas gift he wanted is his wife and children back.

The aim of the Sri Lanka mission was to provide emergency psychological first aid to survivors and train mental health volunteers given the lack of access to professionals which is typical in remote communities. Only one psychiatrist visited the area, as well as a few substance abuse experts. Community members willing to help and serve as translators for this mission came from a variety of backgrounds, including a young male student, a mature male sports coach, and young females from the resettlement camps.

Throughout this as other experiences, I saw that the pain of mothers and children was being addressed far more readily than that of the men. Yet, many men lost not only their livelihood but many family members including their wife and even several children, perished in the waters and destruction, and thus could benefit from support.

Understanding the cultural context is crucial, as mentioned in the above section of this paper. In this coastal island culture, men are expected to cope and not complain, with stoicism pronounced for fisherman in the heavily male-dominated society of the South Asian fishing villages. In addition, males are neither accustomed nor acculturated to sharing feelings with other men or anyone. While women have been found to report experiencing greater amounts of stress compared to men in response to an earthquake, in the mixedgender discussion groups of the local people we gathered, I noticed that the men sat together and were indeed stoic compared to the women's gendercomparative openness. Yet, sitting near several men, I also noted solemn and sad expressions; and when I delicately brought up emotions to them, I noted their responsiveness, which was proven during my subsequent sessions with them, revealing their willingness and even eagerness by some to share feelings about the experience and losing their wives and children.

As a result, I held two groups involving men: a menonly group and a group of men with children who were not necessarily their own, since many had lost their own children.



Systematic desensitization technique

Narratives in the men-only group

The groups that I facilitated were held in one of the schoolrooms being used to house the displaced people. Men in the group were of various ages. I explained my experience as a psychologist and group facilitator who is expert in providing post-disaster support, presenting an opportunity for them

to share experiences and feelings about the trauma to reduce stress and increase coping, strength and connection. Contrary to cultural expectations, the men were eager to talk with me and the other men.

One 21-year-old father shared, "I had my 9-monthold daughter and my 3-year-old son held tightly under each arm, but as the water rushed over us, they were both ripped from my arms, and went into the sea. I could hear them yelling, 'Father, save me,' but I could not find them." His wife, he explained, was running behind him but she ran too slowly and when the wave reached them, she was swallowed into it. All three of their bodies were never recovered.

Another man reached for this man's hand. He held up the picture of his own family -- his wife and children -- who had also all been taken by the raging tsunami waters. Tears came to his eyes as he pointed them out on the photo.

A 44-year old man shared his common experience. "I lost my wife, too, and my three daughters, age 16, 13 and 6. They were beautiful. I miss them terribly." His son is the only one not claimed by the tidal wave. He explained how he sees them in his dreams. He described his devotion to his departed wife, whereby contrary to the tradition of arranged marriages, theirs was a "love match" based on their mutual attraction and choice. As he talked about his love for her, he looked deep into my eyes and tears rolled down his cheeks. I held his hand as he cried, and feeling his deep sadness, so did I.

"There is no reason to live," he said. Highly sensitive to the potential risk, I responded that he has to live for their sake and for his surviving son, and suggested that he imagine them saying, "Daddy, we want you to live. We love you and we are ok." I added, "They are all counting on you" and "You have a purpose, you are meant to be here."

"Look at me please and promise me you will not commit suicide," I asked him. "Please tell me, 'Dr. Judy, I promise you I will not commit suicide." He put his hand on my head and promised. Making such a pact to tie lives together is helpful, consistent with clinical practice. I experienced the value of that technique years ago, when "talking down" a man who was perched on the ledge of a high-rise building, threatening to jump. When he finally came off his perilous perch, he explained to me that what made him change his mind and not jump was that I said that my life would be ruined if he jumped since I now felt connected to his destiny. What I said, he told me, made him feel really cared about, which he had not felt all his life, the lack of which contributed to his despair.

Besides following-up to get him help within the area's albeit limited resources, I asked the other men to support him, to stay in touch with each other and become a support system for each other. They agreed.

Also, I reassured him that crying is healing psychologically and physically. As Frey & Langseth report (1985), human tears contain an endorphin, leucine-enkephalin, thought to modulate stress-induced changes in the immune system and one of the brains' natural pain relievers.

As is typical of survivors, many of the Batticoloa widowers expressed feelings that can be considered as survivor guilt – wondering why they survived while others died. This reaction is exacerbated for men facing gender expectations, and is a valid form of suffering which needs to be treated with appropriate interventions and treatment strategies (Kristensen et al., 2012).

Trained mental health professionals are limited in number in the country. The one psychiatrist who comes to the city occasionally, Dr. Daya Somasundaram of Jaffna University, told me that the men are at high risk for depression, sleeping disorders, somatic complaints, escalation of alcoholism and even suicide, consistent with research findings (Amarnath, 2012). Besides loss of their home and livelihood, he found their torment magnified by

the agony of being helpless to stop the death of their family or finding themselves unprepared to raise surviving children on their own.

As shown by research, many men turn to drinking even more heavily than before, as one local addiction counselor told me.

In a society of strict gender roles, these men now have to rebuild their seaside industry, without the help of their wives who played a crucial role not only as homemakers but in marketing the fish or other goods. While U.S. Census figures show that widowers generally remarry within three years of a wife's death, remarriage is not as easy in other cultures.

"I don't know what to do for my children," one man told me. "I need my wife but I cannot find a new wife here."

Widowers face questions: Who am I now? How does a bereaved man adjust to the enormity of the loss of a wife and/or children in healthy ways? How does a man get on with his life?

This reaction is exacerbated for men facing gender expectations, and a valid form of suffering which needs to be treated with appropriate interventions and treatment strategies (Kristensen et al., 2012).

In their study of older widowers, social work professors Moore and Stratton (2001) found that resilient widowers identify a woman in their life -- a daughter, daughter-in-law or neighbor -- whom they can count on to help.

The connection formed in the group confirmed the lesson I had learned from many post-disaster situations that being fully present with survivors is the most healing approach compared to any specific technique or intervention.

The experience also reinforced the value of the group process for helping men cope, as shown by research about group therapy and literature in the evolving field of the psychology of men. In the group, the men were given permission to share emotions like guilt and impulses, gain an understanding of stress and tension and how to relieve it. and provide ongoing support to each other.

In fact, extensive research shows that social support positively linked to psychological and physical wellbeing and acts as a buffer against stress (Burns & Kenny, 2018, Cohen & Wills, 1985; CRISMART, 2015) a fact I have found and documented in my work in extensive post-disaster situations worldwide (Kuriansky, 2008, 2011, 2012a, 2013a, 2019b; Kuriansky & Jean Charles, 2012; Kuriansky et al., 2015, 2016, 2017).

Boys post disaster

Disasters can be even more stressful for children and youth than for adults, as they struggle to comprehend what happened and fear when it will happen again (as I have heard many children express post-disaster). Commonly in the case of children, emotional reactions reflecting fears and anxieties manifest in physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches), cognitive symptoms (confusion), behavioral and social symptoms (nightmares, withdrawal, acting out) not only immediately but over the long-term which must be addressed (Kuriansky, 2013a, 2013b; LaGreca et al., 2002). Pre-existing, structural gender inequalities mean that disasters affect boys in some different ways than girls (CDP, n.d.) and that gender norms described above for men equally apply to boys.

Given the major role parents play in their children's adjustment (SAMHSA, n.d.), the death of a parent unleashes significant problems of loss and orphanhood. Fortunately, in some tight-knit community cultures where family ties are extensive, children can be cared for by extended members, but in such extensive deaths as in the tsunami, immediate relatives were not always available.

During the intervention in Sri Lanka, I conducted several mixed gender groups for children living in the

shelters, all of whom had suffered the death of two to three, and up to four, family members. The activities were intended to reduce fears and nightmares and to reinforce coping skills and mastery. These included simple breathing techniques and reframing the trauma, for example, transforming helplessly hearing a mother's screams being swallowed by the waves as "Help me, help me" into an imaginary message from the mother to "Live on for us and be healthy, my beloved child", an acknowledged useful technique of reframing. Also, in an in-vivo desensitization activity, I took children and adults to the site of the trauma (the seaside), with positive outcome, supported by self-reports of the degree of their relaxation shown by holding up the corresponding number of fingers. Other activities from my toolbox (Kuriansky, 2008) stimulated energy and also relaxation.

Many techniques I used with children in the intervention were arts-based, consistent with extensive research and experience of my own and many other researchers and practitioners showing the value of this approach for children in post-disaster and conflict settings (Art Saves Lives, 2015; Chilcote, 2007; International Child Art Foundation, n.d.; Kuriansky et al., 2017; 2019a, 2019b; Malchiodi, 2005; Smilan, 2009).

Although many of the children were at risk for varied serious reactions from the extent of the trauma (fears, stress, grief, depression), they were obviously able in the activities to express joy and playfulness appropriately, demonstrating resilience. While the boys were slightly more inhibited than the girls, they still participated actively.

Considering the value of drawing as a significantly useful arts-based activity in vast literature as well as my own experiences in trainings and interventions, I asked the children to draw their family (Biasi et al., 2015), the experience of the tsunami, and a bridge which elicits coping by transitioning from a negative to a positive experience (Yedida & Itzhaky, 2004). The drawings were used as discussion tools with the children, for example, with my asking, "What is a quality about you that your parent was proud of?" and having the other children repeat back that quality to the child for validation and enhanced self-



Dr. Judy Kuriansky and volunteer transltors/ assistants leading activities with children

The case of Viniscot

Viniscot is an 8-year-old boy whose father and brother died in the tsunami. His drawing of the tsunami displays the chaos he must have seen and felt. Trees and figures he identified as people are submerged in the water.

He shares that he loves birds – seen in his drawing – and that on the day of the tsunami, he had ventured out of the house to see the birds, when he heard screaming and shouting as the waves came. He and his brother ran – and saw water sweep their house away. He shared that he sees all of these things in his nightmares.

When asked what word his mother would use to describe him -- a self-esteem building activity that I commonly include – he smiles and says: "a good runner". When the other children repeat that quality back to him, he is pleased to hear this.

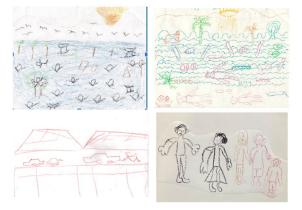
The case of Anbu

Anbu is a 13-year-old boy whose mother and brother died in the waters. His tsunami drawing depicts the drama of people in the water appearing to cry and shout but also a relief boat, outlined in red, saving people. He shares that people in the boat are his father, brother, and two friends. He explains that he and his two brothers climbed a tree to avoid being swept up into the massive waves. They had trouble hanging on and fell out of the tree but luckily he

was able to grab hold of a floating log to stay alive. His mother and brother died and their bodies were never recovered. He has recurring nightmares about their deaths. He holds my hand and smiles while talking about feeling sad. In drawing his family, all the members are on one side of the paper but he draws himself on the other side.

He describes himself as a hard worker and a good learner, qualities his mother would appreciate him for, and smiles broadly when this is repeated back to him.

His drawing of a bridge is faint, in only one color though supplied with a variety, and lacks strong structure holding up the crossing, suggesting need for support.



Drawings of the tsunami, bridge and family

Case of Ardu

Ardu explains to the group that his mother, who was the only family member home at the time of the tsunami, was washed away in the waters. He is able to talk about it, but his eyes remain shifted downward. His tsunami sketch shows a wall of waves with objects, trees, a house and people floating in the water, although two figures are in a tiny boat not immersed in the waves.

His self-described word is that he is very good at studying. He also smiles when this word is repeated back to him, and says he benefited from this exercise.

Bringing men and children together in a ritual

Besides stereotypes of masculinity, cultural and religious traditions must be considered in men's recovery. Ritual and prayer has been shown to be important in recovery, especially in certain cultures (Ha, 2015; Kalayjian & Eugene, 2010; Kalayjian et al., 2010; Kuriansky, 2011). The pain of the Sri Lankan Hindu men was escalated by the destruction of their temples that left them with no opportunity to properly perform mourning rituals. Since our team's efforts were unsuccessful in arranging a proper mourning ceremony, I improvised a ritual which had some elements of rituals I had previously used in other disaster settings. In the face of the tragedy of the natural disaster that destroyed means of traditions, creating new traditions is essential.



Tsunami destruction

The ceremony that I devised built on familiar Hindu rites. Diwali is a sacred Hindu festival of Lights where light triumphs over dark and good over evil, unleashing blessings of enlightenment. Candles are used in a daily ritual of worship and offering, to represent the light of the gods and the connection between the individual and the divine light. My concept was to have a group of children orphaned from the tsunami paint candles and give them to the

widowers, and then to perform an improvised group ceremony with the lit candles and prayer.



Group of men and children in the mourning and rebirth ritual

The shape of the candles was culturally relevant, as it comprised the yin-yang – the eastern symbol of light and dark, life and death, and all opposites or halves that make up the whole of life. Hinduism, the predominant religion in the northern area of Sri Lanka, offers a message of hope. In the tradition, the Hindu God Shiva symbolizes both creation and destruction with the lesson that even in destruction, something new is created.

In a dramatic moment, the men lit the candles as the children looked on in awe. Tears came to the eyes of many of us. New "families" were formed at that moment as the men and children bonded.

Discussion

The following section address some reflections about challenges of capacity in low resource settings as was the case for this tsunami, as well as coping for men, and issues regarding gender-based emergency management.

Challenges of Capacity

Trained mental health professionals were limited in number in Sri Lanka, as in similar situations, yet, the need for mental health support is great. Statistics report that 65 % of men use alcohol and drug use to cope, and an increase in suicide rates, more than three times that of women (Department of Census and Statistics, n.d.). As the only psychiatrist on the island, the ability of psychiatrist Dr. Somasundaram (mentioned above) to care for the extensive needs of the population was drastically stretched. A 5-year retrospective analysis of the psychosocial work done in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami as a practitioner learning study showed profound effects of the disasters and highlighted the importance for the need for psychosocial and mental health support services in the face of such events (Wessells & Kostelny, 2021).

Coping for men

Men are pushed to exhibit "appropriate" masculine behaviors during crises (being strong and calm, controlling emotions, and taking risks) and essentially avoiding stereotypic "feminine" reactions (crying, panicking, being depressed, overly expressive about feelings), these demands can lead men to engaging substance abuse to mask emotional states or to lash out aggressively against women, children or even other men (Dominelli, 2002; Rushton et al., 2022). Other unhealthy coping can include overworking, avoidance and silence and purposeful repression (Rushton et al., 2022).

Healthy coping strategies for men need to address specific gender issues, including suspending stereotypic views of masculinity, allowing emotional responses, resisting substance abuse, and asking for help.

The value of mind-body techniques (mindfulness, relaxation) and those based on expression and emotional intelligence are increasingly noted (Bulathwatta et al., 2017) and can be useful for males as well as females of all ages. Some of these activities (meditation, breathing, body relaxation, yoga) derived from and are therefore consistent with Eastern culture.

Gender-based emergency management

Since men are an integral part of their familial and community context, their welfare has wider impact on planning that is essential for a "whole of society" recovery of the social system, cultural environment, and community (Kuriansky, 2012a; CRISMART, 2015).

In a review of literature over a decade on the needs of male and female disaster survivors, the authors concluded the importance of gender mainstreaming in disaster management in order to accommodate the needs of all survivors (Fajarwati et al, 2020). Another extensive literature review revealed existing gaps in gender analysis and that more needs to be known about analytical tools and indicators to address differing needs of women and men and to evaluate gender vulnerability and capacity in predisaster and post-disaster phases of the disaster management cycle (Sohrabizadeh et al., 2014).

Some recognition has been paid to the importance of including considerations of men in gender emergency management (Enarson, 2008). Recommendations have included outreach to disaster-affected men through men's social and sport clubs and workplacebased programs; gender-sensitive disaster mental health outreach to men living in stressful conditions or who may have weak social ties (widowers, homeless men, migrant workers, men in threatened livelihoods and those who are unemployed); and community-based strategies for educating boys, teens and adult men about the human impacts of disaster including increased substance abuse and interpersonal violence (Enarson, 2008). Additionally, Hazelegar (2013) identified masculinity traits such as risk-taking as a hazardous factor to the well-being of men and therefore recommended incorporating gender as a key element in emergency management and health policies and recovery.

Differences between men and women postdisaster are important for disaster management (Enarson, 2008). Several dimensions that must be addressed include: exposure to risk (with women disproportionately exposed to poverty); risk perception (men being more "risk taking" and women more "risk avoidant"); preparedness behavior (women seek out information about hazards more than men, volunteer more for local preparedness programs like in schools, and are more likely than men to take part in community organizations addressing local environmental or technological hazards); warning communication and response (more men than women disregard evacuation orders); physical impacts (mortality); psychological impacts (women and girls express more mental health problems while men are more likely to suffer the effects of substance abuse); emergency response (men are more likely to assist strangers, through search and rescue efforts while women offer more sustained emotional support to disaster victims as volunteers and within the family, and men more often than women hold leadership roles in established economic and political organizations); recovery (women are more likely than men to seek help over the long-term from outside agencies); and reconstruction (women are likely to remain in temporary accommodations longer than men; fewer women-headed businesses receive government post-disaster loans).

A noteworthy example of a country's disaster management plan is the 4RF of Pakistan, where the "F" stands for "framework" and the 4R's are Resilience, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Recovery, (Government of Pakistan, 2022). The plan was devised by the Government of Pakistan Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives in response to the devastating floods in the country, as a guide for programmatic priorities, policy framework, institutional arrangements, financing strategy, and implementation arrangements to build and strengthen long-term resilience to climate-induced disasters. The framework calls for the application of "gender-sensitive" recovery and reconstruction, with an extensive listing of population groups, which includes landless farmers, which includes women, youth, refugees, Given the idiosyncratic responses of men as outlined here and in the literature, such lists might in future mention men when appropriate. The model can be useful in other cultures.

Recommendations and Conclusions

It is ironic in this age where diversity and multicultural awareness has become increasingly important that we have yet to fully understand and examine

gendered outcomes of the interface between natural disasters and patterns of bereavement among men and boys.

As has been proposed for women and girls, recommendations to help men cope post-disaster include to provide programs and needed funding gender-specific and culturally-appropriate for programs specifically targeted for men and boys that addresses their unique needs, are culturallycompetent and help build their resilience (CDP, n.d.). These can include women and girls but should have components especially designed for men and boys. Such programs and funding should also support prevention programs for men and boys in advance of a disaster to help build resilience. These can follow models, for example, in Togo and other African countries where women gather in a "Mothers Club" of women who live close by who are trained in gender-specific issues which for women would involve maternal and child health.

More scientific research is needed to identify postdisaster psychosocial difficulties experienced by men and especially for boys. Also, policymakers need to draft policy to support efforts of for providers and stakeholders to offer needed programs and services (Kuriansky, 2020).

Training local volunteers, using well-documented train-the-trainer techniques whereby local volunteer are recruited and taught simple techniques to aid sufferers, has been shown to be a practical and useful way to build capacity post-disasters, especially in remote locations with few mental health resources, including in my own intervention experiences (Kuriansky et al., 2015, 2017). Funding needs to provide sustainability for such trainings. Community trainees such as those involved in the mission described in this paper are very useful to provide needed support to survivors especially in low available settings. Community volunteers who boost capacity can be effectively and efficiently recruited even once a mission is on the ground. Simple interventions, conforming to the guidelines of the Interagency Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) can be taught, including active listening, empathizing with experienced stress, supporting the grieving process, and identifying those who need more specialized help.

Men can benefit from male role models of being more expressive (Kuriansky, 2003). The value of leaders in the community serving as male role models postdisaster was evident in the United States where city and national government officials demonstrated emotions, for example, when the "tough" New York City Mayor cried at funerals of first responders from the attacks on the World Trade Center, when the U.S. President wiped tears from his eyes when speaking of children massacred in the 2012 Connecticut school shooting, and when the New Jersey Governor exploded angrily over inadequate government support for recovery after the 2012 super storm Sandy.

Just as considering gender when conducting research has been recommended to be important for women and girls in post-disaster planning (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, n.d.), similar consideration needs to be applied to males. This includes funding of gender-disaggregated data studies to understand the needs of men and boys and addressing specific impacts of disaster on males, leading to the development of gender-specific programming that addresses men's unique needs that then can lead to better outcomes for men.

Similarly, while a study demonstrated the value of active participation by women in community-based disaster recovery efforts (Drolet et al., 2015), men should also be engaged in these broader community efforts. Much research has highlighted the primacy of social support networks, including family, friends, and community resources, in recovery from crises, to create the sense of belonging and connection that promotes well-being and resilience including specifically for men (Burns & Kenny, 2018).

The importance of providing gender-sensitive services for men post-disaster is crucial as their adjustment is

integrally tied to the outcome of children, women, and their community and to maintain the familial, community and social system. Consideration about men's needs to be integrated into gender-based programming at all levels, emergency management, planning humanitarian aid, and policymaking, both in disaster recovery and disaster risk reduction. This approach is more consistent with social justice as well as achieving sustainable development. Clearly more positive post-disaster outcomes for men will ameliorate the already known risks to women's psychological, financial, and social well-being, safety, and recovery.

Understanding the unique experiences of men and boys in the aftermath of natural disasters is crucial in terms of their personal beliefs as well as social and cultural stereotypes and stigma. In doing so, researchers, practitioners, program developers and policymakers can target and tailor approaches to the mental health and well-being of men and boys that greatly impact the whole of society. Evidence-based research would greatly add to the knowledge-base needed for effectively planning and implementing services to boost men's resilience and coping after natural disasters and related traumatic events.

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Unequal Beginnings: Reconnoitering Gender Socialization Practices in Nepal

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"Gender is not a binary concept but a spectrum influenced by culture, society, and individual experiences. Understanding and addressing gender bias in socialization is crucial for achieving true equality."

The process whereby members of any society act according to the rules and regulations is known as socialization in the social sciences. This is the process whereby an individual acquires and internalizes the attitude, beliefs, values, skills, and knowledge of the society to which he belongs. Culture transmits these endowments from one generation to the next, ensuring their continuity and maintenance. The socialization process is a two-way process. There are socialize and socializer or socialization agents and socialization agencies. A socialize is a child who acquires culturally desirable behavior whereas socializers are parents, carers, parent surrogates, teachers, peer groups, and social and political leaders (depending on the social organization). The agencies of socialization are family, school, college, and social organization such as religious groups, political groups, and recreational professional groups (Punetha et. al., 2024, 2021).

The process of socialization has been conceptualized as a process of enculturation, whereby an individual acquires the approved ways or behavioral systems of the culture. Psychoanalytical and psychological explanation for the socialization is learning of impulse control suggesting that man is guided by instincts for the social adjustment one has to tame one's own instinctual behavior (Goslin, 1966). Some anthropologically oriented psychologists define the process of socialization as role learning. At some point in time, an individual is a family member; he or she may be a family child; at the same time, one may be a student in school, a playmate in the playground, a member of the church or temple, a religious group, or an ethnic group. This suggests that individuals have to play multiple roles at different points in time and in different places. He must learn to play these roles effectively. In some of the roles, there is choice whether he wants to play or not, for example, if he does not want to attend religious meetings depending on the importance of religion in society, he can do so. In other roles, there is no choice, such as if an individual is male or female (though at present, in medically advanced societies, individuals can change their gender biologically as well as socially, but still, this is not regarded as a normal social behavior). Whether they like it or not, they have to enact their roles. For example, gender roles are rigidly enforced in Indian society. In Indian society, males and females have solid or non-permeable social boundaries. The social boundaries of males and females were solid or non-permeable from the time of Manu (in the Laws of Manu, 1886, it is stated that women are never free, in childhood, a father protects them; a husband in youth; and a son in old age. This indicates that women have to live under the subordination of men throughout the life the boundaries of women's roles are not permeable still today despite the fact that the socio-economic resources of Hindu society are in flux and changing One of the important changes is that women contribute to the economic resources of the family (Basu, 1983).

This study investigates the favoritism, importance, and preferences of a son in comparison to a daughter in the family and in society at large. Because of favoritism towards son, there is difference, disparity, and inequality in social status and the rearing of daughters. Since parents and socialization agents deliberately try to train and rear children during childhood, Parents rear children from birth,

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consciously and implicitly raising them in accordance with their cultural norms, ideologies, and values. Their society shares this guideline, rooted in their culture, values, and belief system. The parents would treat the son rather than the daughter because the son carries the family name, whereas the daughter would get married, go to her husband's household and create an economic burden for the family in the form of a dowry. Several studies (Minturn & Hitchcock, 1963; Poffenberger, 1981; Miller, 1971; Basu, 1983; Minturn, 1993) on Indian families revealed that the marriage of the daughter in the Hindu community drains the family economy in terms of dowry and the marriage of a daughter is necessary for the prestige of the family and for religious achievements. More importantly, if there is a son despite being disabled or not, he would perform the funeral rites of the father after his death to ensure the safe transit of his soul from this world to the next. Poffenberger (1981) interviewed fathers to reveal the disadvantages of having a son, but they could not state any disadvantage. While there were many disadvantages of having a daughter, the economic factor was the most important one. Therefore, having a disabled son is considered preferable to having a non-disabled daughter or no child at all, as it is believed that by performing certain funeral rites, sons can save their fathers from hell, a significant spiritual achievement. Therefore, sons occupy a superior status in the Hindu community.

Miller (1987), in her report on Punjab (North India), reported that the hospital wards were consistently empty of girls, and parents did not bring their daughters to the hospital for treatment. They escorted their sons to the hospital instead. One parent said, "If one daughter dies, then let her die; I have another daughter." This instance indicated that the girls occupy a less valuable status in the family and society. Wyon and Gordon (1971), in their Punjab study, found that the rates of death from all causes were higher among female children than male children. Researchers found that girls under two years of age had a substantially smaller chance of survival than boys of the same age. Researchers attributed this disparity to the higher quality of medical care and possibly more supplementary food for boys.

Zachner (1962), in his work on Hinduism, stated that the status of women in the Hindu community was always under the subordination of men from the days of the Laws of Manu: "A woman, according to the Hindu Dharma, is never swatantra; she never has a thread of her own. She is not her own mistress. In childhood, she was subject to her father, in marriage to her husband, and after his death to her eldest son. They expected her to uphold the highest standards of modesty and decorum. (Zaehner, 1962)."

The rural community of India strictly adheres to the rules of the Hindu religion. Hindu Code life encompasses numerous dimensions in which girls and boys receive distinct treatment. There are some recent studies that also indicate that the image of women in the Indian socio-cultural scene is still not close enough to the ideal of gender equality (Basu, 1993). According to Bambwale (1994), Hindi films made between 1982 and 1992 focused more on the image of women as mothers, wives, aunts, dancing girls, and educated foreign return women as vamps. They never mention the status and competence they have. The emphasis is on her role as a submissive, slavish woman. Her educational achievements remain unclear. Her occupational status is never specified. A woman's ambitions are directed towards acquiring a husband and worshipping him as a God (Kaker, 1979). Indian daughters receive new household tasks and responsibilities as they mature. Late childhood marks the beginning of an Indian girl's deliberate training in how to be a good woman, resulting in the conscious inculcation of culturally designated feminine roles. Even with education, this remains true (Bombwale, 1994). Indeed, Indian films serve as the primary source of entertainment for the masses, accurately portraying the socio-cultural landscape of the country. Poffernberger (1981) conducted a study on child rearing practices in rural India, revealing a clear preference for and superior physical treatment of sons over daughters. However, if daughters do survive in

infancy and early childhood, mothers seem to be less hostile and emotionally cold to them than sons. He also noted that the female mortality rate was high in comparison to male mortality in that region. Parents reported that they always needed special attention and care for boys, while mother expressed, "A girl is impervious to harm, akin to a stone, while a boy, like a flower, requires tender care" (pp. 83). This clearly demonstrates that girls receive less care than boys due to the long-standing cultural tradition of their inferior status as women in the community.

In their study of child rearing practices in Khalanpur village in North India, Minturn and Hitchcock (1963) also revealed that they studied ninety Rajput children, and among them, two-thirds were boys. Because of their interest in these differences, they asked 36 mothers about the sex of the deceased child, not including those who died in miscarriages and stillbirths. Their mothers reported that nearly twice as many girls as boys died in childhood. The authors attributed the shortage of girls in the village to better medical treatment for boys. The Census of India (1931, 1971) always shows disparity in the male-female ratio. This male-female ratio still exists; the ratio of male-females in adults is 943/1000, and in children it is 919/1000 (Census 2011). The British administrators reported in 1805 that they found nearly no daughters in Gujarat, a region known for various forms of female infanticide (Pakrasi, 1970). Currently, social change is primarily affecting women's visible status in urban areas, where most women work outside the home and contribute to the family income, but their role, relationship, and status within the family remain unchanged. Women's lives show no signs of visible or invisible change. A matrix of factors contributed jointly to their inequality in social status.

The present research investigates gender discrimination in raising children in Nepal (Kathmandu). Nepal is a sovereign Hindu country based on traditional cultural value systems. According to cross-cultural perspectives, Nepal and India have strong cultural ties and strongly believe in the Hindu philosophy of life. Their beliefs about caste, religion, and marriage systems are strikingly similar. There are differences in eco-geographical systems, political, industrial, and constitutional frameworks. Both countries are neighboring countries and have close and frequent interaction. Many families on the border between India and Nepal have frequent interactions, marriage relations, ceremonies, and festivals. At political and economic levels, the relationship between countries is smooth. Sinha and Verma (1993) argue that Indian culture is collectivistic, prioritizing collective goals, while individualism prioritizes individual goals, selfreliance, and emotional detachment from the group to varying degrees. The study found that mothers and fathers in Nepal used a TST to measure their selfconcept. Role identity and gender identity emerged as significant features of the self-concept. Triandis (1993) posits that in a collectivist culture, factor analysis highlights the importance of serving in the group, cooperation, and harmony within the ingroup, while in individualist cultures, the emphasis is on distance from parental competition. Traiandis et al. (1993) again emphasize that socialization patterns in collectivist culture are obedience, duty, sacrifice for group cooperation, and favoritism towards ingroups, acceptance of in-group authorities, nurturing and interdependence, self-reliance, creativity, and acceptance of disobedience if a child is especially competent.

Chodorow (1999) provides a foundational framework for understanding gender and socialization. Her work emphasizes the influence of early socialization on the development of gender identity and roles, arguing that family dynamics and societal expectations play pivotal roles in perpetuating gender norms. Amin and Hossain (2009) examine the specific context of Nepal, highlighting gender bias in the education system. Their study reveals how educational practices and policies often disadvantage girls, leading to broader social implications such as reduced economic opportunities and limited social mobility for women.

This gender bias in education is a significant aspect of the socialization process that shapes the experiences and futures of young Nepalese women.

Acharya (2000) focuses on the patriarchal structures that dominate Nepalese society and how these influence the socialization of women. Her research demonstrates that from a young age, girls are socialized to accept subordinate roles, which perpetuates gender inequality across generations. Acharya's case study underscores the deep-rooted nature of patriarchy and its impact on women's socialization. Sharma (2012) provides a comparative analysis of gender roles in urban and rural Nepal. His study highlights the differences in socialization practices based on geographic location, noting that urban areas tend to have more progressive views on gender roles compared to rural areas. However, even in urban settings, traditional gender norms continue to influence the socialization process significantly.

Gurung (2008) delves into the cultural norms that perpetuate gender disparities in Nepal. His research illustrates how cultural beliefs and practices reinforce gender bias in various aspects of life, including family, education, and employment. Gurung's work emphasizes the need for cultural change to address the root causes of gender bias in socialization. Bhattarai (2015) investigates the impact of gender socialization on educational outcomes in Nepal. By comparing the educational achievements of boys and girls, his study highlights the persistent gender gap and the role of socialization in shaping educational aspirations and achievements. Bhattarai calls for targeted interventions to address gender bias in educational settings.

Subedi (2011) explores the broader implications of gender socialization and its contribution to inequality in Nepal. Her research points to the ways in which gendered socialization processes lead to unequal access to resources and opportunities, further entrenching gender disparities. Subedi advocates for policy changes and educational reforms to mitigate the effects of biased socialization. Maslak (2003) examines the intersection of gender identity and social change in Nepal. Her book provides a comprehensive analysis of how educational and social reforms are influencing gender norms and identities. Maslak's work highlights the potential for education to be a transformative force in challenging traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality.

India and Nepal are not only neighboring and developing countries, but they are also highly religious. Every year, thousands of Nepalese visit temples and shrines in India, such as Badrinath, Sangam Prayagraj, Balaji, and so on. Hindus from India visit temples in Nepal. It seems that only their boundaries separate them; otherwise, both countries are very close in business and marriage relations. In light of the above, it is considered that, like India, Nepal has a Hindu and collectivist culture. The goal of this study is to investigate how parents raise children, particularly sons and daughters. Hindu culture rears its children in a manner that is culturally appropriate. In collectivistic cultures, religion and cultural norms become increasingly prevalent in daily life.

Method

Sample

For the present study, the sample was drawn from Kathmandu, Nepal. Both mothers and fathers were contacted, resulting in a total of 170 couples (n = 170). Each parent was interviewed individually to gather comprehensive data on the socialization practices and experiences within their households. This approach ensured a balanced representation of perspectives from both mothers and fathers, providing a robust dataset for analyzing gender bias in socialization. After establishing the cordial relation with them, a verbal consent has been taken

Measure

Gender bias interview schedule was used (Punetha, Dhawan, Tyler and Sinha, 1998) which consists of 22 items related to five dimensions of socialization:

- Nurturance
- Obedience
- Aggression
- Achievement
- Gender-role differences

Procedure:

The interviews were conducted by two female research assistants in Nepal. Participants were contacted in their homes, workplaces like shops and health centers. On the basis of willingness, good rapport was established with them; a verbal consent has been taken. The interview was conducted on Hindu individuals. Before beginning the interviews all male and female participants were given the introduction of the gender roles and rearing boys and girls were also asked. For their cooperation in the study. They all were willing to talk about the gender issues in their communities.

Results and Discussion

In the present study both Nepali mothers and fathers raised their children by following gender bias which rooted in their culture and country. There were 22 items on five dimensions of socialization, on a fivepoint Likert scale. The parents were asked to assess their agreements to some stereotypical beliefs regarding gender roles in relation to the socialization process. The items demonstrate a positive bias toward male child. Higher the score more favoritism towards male child. The scores of mothers and fathers on each of the 22 items were analyzed by using 't' test. It was found that mothers and fathers equally agreed on 20 items, that a male child should be given more favor in comparison to a female child. Also, on carrying the family name in a patriarchal society. In collectivistic society's socialization patterns are guided by cultural norms and values which are imbibed from a long time. Those are thus considered desirable patterns are transmitted from one generation to next.

The results are explained by taking the following five dimensions: a) Nurturance b) Obedience c)

Aggression d) Achievement e) Gender role difference. These dimensions can be considered as pan-cultural variables by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists.

Nurturance: When a child is very small, mothers take care of feeding, providing nursing diet training, breast feeding and weaning toilet and fulfilling their demands. Both mothers and fathers viewed that there were differences in taking care of sons and daughters in feeding, and global taking care of sons. There was a significant difference between mother and father: mothers emphasized that the care of sons should be done seriously, and more seriously than the care of daughters.

Table1: Showing the mean, standard deviation and *t* value

Group	Mean	SD	t	р
Mother	3.04	2.40		
Father	2.41	1.89	2.045	.042

Disobedience: Going against wishes and directions of parents is considered disobedience. Both mother and father consider that sons and daughters must obey their parents, particularly daughters who must not go out in the evening or at night without an escort unlike a boy. Daughters should dress up properly at the age of 11-12 years, such restrictions are not for sons. Daughters are expected to help in household chores and should not play outside the house; once she is 9-10 years old, such restrictions are not placed on sons.

Aggression: injuring others, damaging property, stealing, abusing others, being disrespectful to elders not using respectful language. For all these activities parents punish daughters more than sons.

Achievement: Encouraging to do something desirable by a son; he is encouraged to do it. The same work if is done for daughters; they are discouraged, usually by saying that you would get

married ultimately, etc. Fathers praise and encourage sons more than to daughters. If a daughter wants to do something extraordinary, she is not encouraged to do it. It is said that whatever you want to do, do after you are married. There is clearly more favoritism for sons.

Table2: Showing the mean, standard deviation and *t* value

Group	Mean	SD	t	р
Mother	2.16	1.62	-1.97	.05
Father	2.71	2.01		

Gender-Role: Daughters are, according to parents, raised fondly and affectionately. But, later on, only the son can protect and support parents in old age. This is Hindu tradition that sons at the time of death of father can only help the father for the safe transit of his soul to the other world, but daughters cannot perform this last rite. So, a son is more desirable than a daughter.

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Raymond Saner¹& Lichia Saner Yiu with Nathan Eyasu and Kagan Rowland CSEND, Geneva



"The words 'despair' and 'frustration' cannot adequately express the depth of my feelings. I wish I could shelter all of the people I see now living in the streets in my heart and protect them from the violence and cold nights. And yet, we too, as humanitarian workers are not immune to this suffering."⁽¹⁾ Humanitarian Aid Worker in Gaza

The stress humanitarian workers endure in today's climate is unlike anything we have seen. Amid delivering aid and support for those in need, which is extremely difficult in and of itself, humanitarian workers must navigate the risky nature and ambiguity of modern warfare, the emotional burden of suffering, and the despair of loss. Above all, humanitarian workers often work under the conditions of unpredictable circumstances with personal risk. In an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) study, nearly 40% of staff were at risk for at least one mental health condition⁽²⁾. As the demand for humanitarian aid workers continues to increase, we must understand the effect of global challenges and the increasing complexity of their job, which can in turn impact on performance and mental states. It is equally urgent to create innovative programs and work organizations that can ensure the safety and well-being of humanitarian delegates while delivering protection and humanitarian aid to the victims.

Definitions and Distinctions

A humanitarian delegate is a professional representative who works for humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World) or the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). These humanitarian delegates are deployed to conflict zones, disaster areas, or regions facing severe humanitarian crises. Their roles involve a wide range of activities aimed at alleviating human suffering and protecting the rights and dignity of affected populations.

The ICRC's mandate is rooted in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, which grant it a unique legal basis to operate in conflict zones. The Geneva Conventions give the ICRC the authority to protect and assist victims of armed conflict, including prisoners of war, the wounded, and civilians. Other humanitarian organizations, while operating under various legal frameworks and international laws, do not have this specific mandate under IHL. They typically derive their authority from agreements with host countries, UN resolutions, or their organizational charters.

Humanitarian workers can be employed by a wide range of organizations, including international NGOs, local NGOs, UN agencies, and sometimes government agencies. The scope of organizations they can work for is broader than that of delegates.

Humanitarian workers can be employed by a wide range of organizations, including international NGOs, local NGOs, UN agencies, and sometimes government agencies. The scope of organizations they can work for is broader than that of delegates. Humanitarian workers cover a wide array of functions, from emergency relief and development work to logistics, health care, education, and community development. Their work tends to be more handson and operational, directly involving the delivery of services and aid to affected population.

While both humanitarian delegates and humanitarian workers aim to alleviate suffering and provide aid, humanitarian delegates tend to

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have more specialized, mandate-driven roles with representational duties, whereas humanitarian workers have a broader, more operational focus on direct service delivery.

Focus of this study

While work stress can be experienced by Humanitarian Delegates and Humanitarian Workers, this study focuses on the occurrence of work stress by Humanitarian Delegates. The reason for this special focus is due to the fact that a first publication on work stress published in 1990 by the first author was based on an analysis of work stress of Humanitarian Delegates of the ICRC. This second study aims at comparing the stress factors and manifestations of today's Humanitarian Delegates in general including the stress of ICRC Delegates but going beyond a single Humanitarian Organization. Future studies clarifying the stress factors of Humanitarian Workers would be very relevant in light of the fact that conflicts are growing and attending to victims are shared concerns of Humanitarian Delegates and Delegate Workers.

Contemporary circumstances

According to the United Nations (UN), the demand for humanitarian aid is at record levels, with 360 million people in need of humanitarian assistance as of June 2023⁽⁴⁾. This demand is a direct result of a world facing mounting polarization and conflict as reported by OCHA (2022)⁽³⁾. The Global Peace Institute's (GPI) 2023 Report described 2022 as "the deadliest year for armed conflict since the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the deadliest year in the history of the GPI" $(p. 3)^{(4)}$. In view of the increases of violence against increasing violence against people who provide aid, Switzerland, an elected member of the UN Security Council, took the initiative to negotiate a draft resolution on the protection of humanitarian and UN personnel. The adoption of the resolution is an important signal for the protection of civilians. The resolution garnered widespread support, with a total of 97 UN member states co-sponsoring the initiative. (FDFA, 24th May 2024)

In every continent, inequality, ethnic strife, and geopolitics create new triggers for aggression and violence between various warring factions. All the more, humanitarian workers are called upon to deliver essential resources into increasingly desolate and dangerous environments. Their resilience and agility when faced with adversary conditions determine their effectiveness in carrying out their responsibilities and missions, and indirectly impacting the survival and vulnerability of the victims. Thus, it is important to evaluate the impact that factors affecting their working conditions have on the mental well-being of humanitarian workers.

Today, the nature of war has made the role of a humanitarian delegate more demanding and more risky. In decades past, the neutral role of humanitarian workers in the context of war was respected. Humanitarian workers wore uniforms and bore symbols that signaled their neutrality, and combatants respected their role as an impartial humanitarian third party ⁽⁵⁾. International humanitarian law also protects civilians from direct attacks. However, the rise of splintered rebel groups and non-state militarized factions has drastically changed the boundaries of combatants, civilians, and humanitarian delegates on the battle ground.

Heavily populated areas are becoming a common site of conflict, causing mass casualties among civilians (Brehm, 2012). In addition, combatants of armed groups are no longer wearing identifiable uniforms or insignia anymore as an evasive strategy or camouflage. Thus, from 1989 to 2010, 60% of rebel groups and 50% of government forces now deliberately and indiscriminately attacked civilians ⁽⁶⁾. The lack of respect for civilian life has also impacted the treatment of humanitarian workers. 108 UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff have been killed aiding civilians in Gaza since October 2023⁽⁶⁾. 19 aid workers were killed in Sudan from April to August 2023 ⁽⁷⁾. Humanitarian workers must now assist and protect innocent civilians without the guarantee that their own safety will be respected. The emotional and mental toll these circumstances have on humanitarian workers cannot be overstated.

Contracted private military and security companies (PMSCs) have also contributed to more dangerous working conditions for humanitarian workers. PMSCs act as militarized factions that operate outside of public view, making them a favorable option for some

countries to achieve national interests without being subject to much public backlash for brutal actions and human rights violations (Saner, 2015). Because PMSCs are a relatively recent development, they operate in a vacuum since national regulatory frameworks are often absent and cannot be subject to international law for human rights abuses due to their non-state actor status (Del Prado, 2011). As such, PMSCs have made serious human rights violations that have also impacted aid workers. UN experts from Working Groups on The Use of Mercenaries concluded that the Wagner group, a PMSC linked to Russia operating in the Central African Republic, "conducted gross and systematic human rights violations, including mass summary executions, arbitrary detentions, sexual violence, looting, enforced disappearances and torture during interrogations," in addition to "harassment of peacekeepers and aid workers." (8) Aid workers state that negotiations with PMSCs are entirely different from rebel groups in that they operate under different interests (9). PMSCs add another dimension to the already challenging work of humanitarian delegates as they are an actor that perpetuates human rights abuses, refuses demands for humanitarian aid, and threatens the safety of humanitarian workers.

The safe humanitarian space is also being breached due to the pervasive intrusions caused by digital actors. Humanitarian aid workers must also confront the possibility of cyber-attacks as technology has increasingly been weaponized to retrieve data, spread misinformation, and threaten aid workers. During times of conflict, combating parties may decide to manipulate the trust and credibility of humanitarian spaces for their interests. During a rise in ethnic tensions in Assam for example, false social media posts indicating renewed attacks on the Muslim population caused substantial humanitarian impacts. This example illustrates how misinformation can significantly impact humanitarian operations ⁽¹⁰⁾. Information communication technologies (ICTs) have also been utilized to threaten and agitate attacks on NGOs. In Mogadishu, militant Somali group Al Shabab attacked a UN Development Programme (UNDP) compound, directed a personal threat to UN Resident Representative Nicholas Kay, and shared personal details of two staff members who were killed (Vazquez Llorente et al., 2014). This demonstrates

the ability of militant groups to access personal information and spread fear through broadcasting threats on the internet. Humanitarian aid workers must face the growing threat of attack in the digital space as ICT infrastructure is further integrated into their operations.

Beyond the context of conflict, the growing impact of climate change is ramping up the need for humanitarian aid. In the last decade, climate-related disasters almost tripled in comparison to the 1980s ⁽¹¹⁾. The uptick in disasters has triggered 24.9 million new displacements in 2019 ⁽¹²⁾. In many areas where conflict already creates demand for humanitarian aid, climate change further exacerbates conditions for aid to be delivered. Yemen, a country already riddled with conflict, is experiencing climate-induced water shortages which further provoke an already desolate situation ⁽¹³⁾. It is estimated that by 2050, 1.2 billion people could be displaced due to natural disasters ⁽¹⁴⁾. The growing demand for humanitarian aid will stress an already under-resourced and under-financed sector, which will in turn contribute to greater stress on the populations already suffering from war and environmental crises as well as on the humanitarian delegate working in these hardship environments without sufficient means to offer relief and support.

Compounding factors that have given rise to increased demand for humanitarian aid are creating funding gaps that contribute to the stress and work overload of humanitarian workers. Although the generosity of donors today has been unmatched, funding gaps for humanitarian assistance have gone from \$4.6 billion in 2013 to \$22.2 billion in 2022 (15). There is evident donor fatigue at a time when humanitarian crises have intensified greatly. For humanitarian workers, this gap translates into job cuts and site closures, creating work overload, threatening service delivery and vigilance over human rights violations. On a personal side, these saving measures or cuts create uncertainty for their careers and well-being. In 2023, the ICRC's funding gaps created 1,800 job losses and the closure of 26 global sites ⁽¹⁶⁾. Besides its Ukraine operation, all other humanitarian operations around the world have a negative funding outlook, which will impact the effectiveness of the ICRC's operations and consequently its mission of protecting the victim of war. It goes without saying, humanitarian workers are

dealing with an increasingly difficult workload with fewer resources. Work related stress symptoms will most likely increase significantly and could become a prevailing part of the organizational life of an ICRC delegate, especially in already difficult locations and postings.

Scope, theory, and sources of stress

This article builds on an initial paper written by the first author (Saner, 1990) who worked as an ICRC delegate and expert in Human Resource Management and Training. He described the difficult conditions of aid work in daily life reflecting on the pioneering work of Hans Selye (1976) and applied pioneering knowledge of some of the occupational stress concepts developed by Davidson & Cooper (1981) which were then broken down into the work arena, home arena, social, cultural and environmental arena, and individual arena. He also added categories that are more directly related to the humanitarian work of an ICRC delegate such as fight-flight impasse, unpredictability of emergency situations, work ambiguity and cognitive dissonance. Some of these categories are described below.

Since this initial report, many studies on the effects of stress on humanitarian workers have been conducted by different researchers such as De Jong et al. (2022), Ager et al. (2012), Yunn et al. (2023), and Antares Foundation (2012). These studies have increased the general understanding of the effects of stress on humanitarian workers. This article recognizes and incorporates the work done by these studies and expands on the contemporary theory of stress in this field by offering a comparative analysis of support strategies and furthering recommendations for the well-being of aid workers.

With the aforementioned contemporary circumstances, the documented stress exhibited by humanitarian aid workers is significant. In a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2018) research project, approximately 30% of international staff reported significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after returning from their assignments. In Uganda, Jordan, and Sri Lanka, between half and two-thirds of the staff in these three countries showed clinically significant levels of depression. A different study by Ager et

al., 2018, found that 39% of humanitarian workers in South Sudan experience depression and 24% are estimated to have PTSD (Ager et al., 2018). Although each context has different stressors, it is essential to understand the recurring themes in humanitarian work that trigger mental health deficiencies, the existing strategies deployed to support aid workers, and opportunities for growth in ensuring the mental health of aid workers. Findings of these three interconnected inquiries help promote the sustainability of humanitarian operations in the long run and will also support humanitarian organizations to comply with a human centered management policy and managerial practices. Some of the following stress factors are specific to the ICRC Delegate in regard to their work of visiting Prisoners of War in detention centers, other stress factors are affecting all Humanitarian Delegates.

Fight-flight impasse

When entering prisons and detention centers, an ICRC Delegate sees detainees or prisoners of war alone without the interference or the presence of prison guards. The so-called EST (*"Entretien Sans Témoins"*; in English, *"Interview without Witness"*) creates an intimate and private space between the delegate and the detainee. Based on this intimacy and the reputation of ICRC, the delegate hears of and, at times, sees the signs of human bestiality and cruelty.

Ill-treated and sometime tortured detainees and prisoners of war (POWs) disclose their pain and misgivings to the delegate who inadvertently empathizes with the detained person and feels some of the suffering which was inflicted on this fellow human being. The normal response would be to act on the information and on his own feelings and to neutralize or eliminate the emotional impact of the stressor, in this particular context, the psychological impact caused by the behavior of the torturerguardian or the jailer who violates fundamental ethical norms and values.

But the contract agreed upon between the ICRC and the detaining authorities severely limits the delegate's room for reactions to the emotional stress of witnessing another human being's suffering. He cannot openly challenge the situation of incarceration without risking expulsion from the country. In fact,

he can only use restrained approaches as a way of intervening, such as diplomacy, negotiation, and persuasion. Anything more drastic or more aggressive as, for instance, public denunciation (as sometimes practiced by Amnesty International) would break the agreed confidentiality resulting in expulsion of the entire operation from the country, in turn jeopardizing the minimum protection of the entire prisoned POW or political detainee population. Yet the delegate cannot opt for the flight response either. He has to protect the victim. His role is to support the detainee or POW and to try to limit and restrain the conduct of the victimizing jailer. The ICRC delegate is caught in an impasse. Neither fight nor flight is possible. He therefore might easily experience a sense of powerlessness and anger. In some ways, he becomes a secondary victim, especially when a prolonged sense of powerlessness leads to feelings of impotence and hopelessness.

The unpredictability of emergency situations

Manmade catastrophes, such as war and armed conflict, are unpredictable. They can be anticipated, but full-scale planning and proactive actions are not possible. Rarely is there time for proactive planning as a way of anticipating measures needed to be undertaken during such calamities. As a result, the Humanitarian Delegate is forced to cope with an uneven workflow. He is easily overstressed during times of emergencies and under-stressed during times of stand-by.

Uncertainties of Humanitarian Work Careers

The unpredictability of humanitarian situations can also be related to a sense of career impasse. Like many humanitarian organizations, Humanitarian Organizations like the ICRC struggle to offer job security to its employees, while work stations can change rapidly. Only a small group of staff achieves a permanent employment status. The delegate cannot always expect lifetime employment. This lack of career prospects and tenure opportunities can create a sense of anxiety among the staff who may see a diminishing return of their continued field assignments, but also lack time to prepare for a career transition when returning to the home base.

Additionally, job insecurity means staff may at times consider themselves as competitors more so than colleagues, further reducing the sources of emotional and social support available. Indeed, delegates must work with a diverse range of personalities in oftentimes challenging settings. Occasionally, these personalities can clash, adding further stress.

Work ambiguity

The delegate is also faced with the conflict of having to choose between a therapeutic as opposed to an administrative-legal approach. The delegate's primary function is to safeguard the application of the Geneva Conventions. He acts, therefore, in an administrative and legal capacity.

While visiting detainees or POWs, the delegate has to check a list of prescribed compliance items to make sure that the most important aspects of the Geneva Conventions are respected by the authorities. Yet, oftentimes, he is the only outside person that the POW or the political detainee can talk to. His presence allows for some abreaction of feelings and offers hope which can be crucial for the detainee's general mental and emotional wellbeing. At the same time, it would be impossible for the delegate to start a therapeutic relationship. A continuity of the visits cannot be guaranteed, nor is there a sufficient sense of privacy and security. Neither crisis intervention nor short-term therapy is possible under such circumstances to offer comfort to the suffering fellow being.

Still, something has to be offered to the detainee or POW. Checking a list of guestions and sharing a cigarette is a way to interact, albeit at some distance but there is often a need to create an initially safe environment. Offering psychotherapy or counselling to the detainee or POW directly is too personal and also potentially too risky for the detainee or POW especially if the location is not safe from intrusion or eavesdropping by the jailing personnel. Such psychotherapeutic treatment may also become a challenge if delegates do not have or did not acquire these skills through special training. To find the right mix between administrative and quasi-therapeutic approaches can be extremely stressful, especially if the delegate is young, inexperienced and does not know how close the relationship should be or become between the delegate and the detainee.

Role conflict

The Humanitarian Delegate representing the ICRC

has a multitude of official and unofficial roles to play. To the jailer and government officials he should act as a diplomat and semi-government official; to the detainee, he should be the protector, helper, healer, and friend; to headquarters management, he should be a willing, loyal, and compliant subordinate; to the local staff, he is asked to act in the role of a boss who often, as head of delegation, might be responsible for 20 people and a budget of up to half a million Swiss francs; to the community of the Red Cross organizations, journalists, and to the concerned world at large he should be able to represent ICRC and the victims at the same time.

In order to be effective, the ICRC delegate has to master all these roles and has to be skillful enough to be able to switch roles according to the demands of the situation. Not many people are prepared and able to fulfil such a job description especially when these role-switches could happen within a short span of time in the field, in the middle of conflict and shifting circumstances.

Local social and cultural context

Like diplomats, Humanitarian Delegates are expected to keep some distance from the local community in order to avoid slippage of confidential information. If such a slippage happens, this could not only discredit the organization itself but also, in the final count, harm the victims who need to be protected. On the other hand, the Humanitarian Delegates are expected to find ways to integrate themselves into the new community of the host country in order to establish an effective working relationship with various counterparts, be they government officials, representatives of other Humanitarian Organizations or local employees. To find the right mix between security needs and social and cultural integration is not easy. As a result, Humanitarian Delegates might either over-identify with the local community or remain aloof and isolated. Neither extreme is preferable, but to stay on middle ground is often a major challenge and can be very stressful.

Individual factors

In addition to stressors emanating from the work environment, Humanitarian Delegates often face multiple stressors concurrently emerging on a more individual basis. While learning a new job, which is the protection of victims of war or armed conflict, the delegate is also learning to live, for instance, in an unfamiliar culture and climate that in some cases may reject their own ingrained cultural habits. As a result, the delegate can experience a strong sense of cultural disorientation leading to a sense of isolation.

While he is coping with cultural disorientation, the delegate is also witnessing the horrors of war and the human suffering so prevalent in detention centers. Seeing all kinds of violence committed in the name of all kinds of -isms, he is forced to re-examine the very foundations of his own belief system and, as a consequence, can easily feel more disoriented and even threatened in his own self-esteem and self-identity. Lazarus (1985) has pointed out that stress: "lies not in the environmental input but in the person's appraisal of the relationship between that input and its demands and the person's agendas (e.g., beliefs, commitments, goals) and capabilities to meet, mitigate or alter these demands in the interests of well-being." (Lazarus, 1985, p. 770)

Some of these external demands can be met through the delegate's own capabilities or be mitigated through effective in-service training programs in areas such as language skills, interpersonal skills, basic understanding of the Geneva Conventions, cross-cultural orientation, and negotiation capabilities. The difficulty over time lies in the loosening of the delegate's own belief and value system, which acts as an appraising and mitigating filter through which the perceived horrors of war and detention can be rationalized and brought under cognitive control.

Cognitive Dissonance

Prolonged exposure to cruelty and destruction can lead to an erosion of the delegate's intellectual armor and a decomposition of his own preferred '-ism' and belief system. This in turn can bring about a cognitive dissonance leading over time to confusion, aggression, depression, existential despair, cynicism, and nihilism (Saner, 1990, p. 3). Cognitive dissonance, as Festinger defined it, means "the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions" (Festinger, 1957, p. 3).

Cruelty and atrocities occur almost everywhere. The justification for cruelty is often found in

various ideological, religious, and idiosyncratic rationalizations. Once the delegate has seen through these justifications, there comes the dangerous moment where the protective armor of his own personal belief system becomes vulnerable. Metaphorically speaking, he might feel as if he were in a house whose roof has been removed by a tornado, leaving him exposed to empty open space. Facile explanations that based on specific groups (e.g., Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, communists, capitalists, etc.) do not hold up anymore against the evidence of observed cruelty in all parts of today's world. In response to this leveling of belief systems, the delegate might strengthen his defense mechanism, become rigid, righteous, and inflexible, or use an escape mechanism of blunting his feelings and indulging his senses in the ancient art of forgetting and pleasure-seeking.

Both approaches might work for a while until further exposure to cruelty and destruction evades these defensive maneuvers as well. It is at this stage that many delegates drop out and leave the organization in order to revert to a previously held mental equilibrium, thus confirming in this sense Festinger's rules which govern prolonged cognitive dissonance. Other delegates experience burnout and become emotionally unstable and in need of urgent support, be this through relocation to a headquarters post in Geneva, or, if need be, through assignment to an outplacement program.

For instance, there was a perception that ICRC delegates were recruited from well-to-do Calvinist families in Geneva. Working for the ICRC was like an initiation rite taking place after the completion of general education and prior to assuming full career and family responsibilities. But this old world is gone and so is the old ICRC. It was therefore no great surprise to hear Cornelio Sommaruga (1988), the first Catholic and Swiss-Italian president of ICRC state: "The Red Cross is not a philosophy or an ideology, nor is it an intellectual notion of the exercise of charity. It is first and foremost a practical action, carried out by a delegate in the field or in Geneva, an action that generally combines common sense, thought, experience and mature judgment."

The transition from a charity-type organization to a more professional humanitarian organization

probably requires a different type of delegate, namely, one who can let go of the old protective belief system while at the same time be able to cope with the cognitive dissonances and multiple stress factors inherent in humanitarian actions in the field. In the next section, we survey some of the literature that can explain and inform the challenges and approaches to addressing these stress factors in humanitarian organizations.

Cognitive dissonance can be identified as a key psychological barrier to the mental health of a humanitarian aid worker. They experience a systematic weakening of one's belief system known as the Belief-Disconfirmation Paradigm (Harmon-Jones et al., 2019). Studies by the American Psychological Association concluded that "dissonance is aroused when people are exposed to information that is inconsistent with their beliefs (Harmon-Jones et al., 2019, p. 6)."

When aid workers are exposed to traumatic experiences which test their belief system, it can cause "rejection or refutation of the information" (Harmon-Jones et al., 2019, p. 6). Such behaviors become dangerous in the context of humanitarian relief, as dissonant delegates may damage the morale and motivation of others. It is then doubly important to treat and contain cases of cognitive dissonance within the humanitarian field, as it can negatively affect both the contracting delegate and their respective delegation. Such conduct will also affect the treatment and wellbeing of the already vulnerable victims of political suppression or conflicts and war.

Cognitive dissonance, the psychological discomfort experienced when holding two or more conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes, can significantly impact a humanitarian delegate in various ways. What follows are specific situation which can cause cognitive dissonance stress for a Humanitarian Delegate.

Ethical Dilemmas:

Neutrality vs. Advocacy:

Delegates often need to remain neutral to gain access to all parties in a conflict. However, witnessing human rights violations can create a conflict between maintaining neutrality and advocating for the victims.

Resource Allocation:

Deciding how to allocate limited resources can create dissonance when delegates must prioritize some needs over others, potentially leading to feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

Personal Beliefs vs. Organizational Policies: Policy Conflicts: A delegate's personal beliefs or ethical standards might sometimes conflict with the policies or strategies of their organization.

Cultural Sensitivities:

Delegates might struggle with practices and norms in the host country that conflict with their own cultural values or human rights standards.

Impact vs. Expectations:

Effectiveness:

Delegates may experience dissonance if they perceive their efforts are not making a significant impact or if the outcomes do not meet their expectations.

Unintended Consequences:

Efforts to provide aid might sometimes result in unintended negative consequences, such as dependency or exacerbation of local conflicts, leading to feelings of responsibility or failure.

Effects of Cognitive Dissonance

Emotional Stress and Burnout:

Persistent cognitive dissonance can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and burnout. The emotional toll of constantly navigating ethical and moral dilemmas can be significant.

Decision-Making Difficulties:

Impaired Decision Making

Dissonance can impair decision-making abilities, making it harder for delegates to make clear, confident choices under pressure.

Decreased Job Satisfaction

Feeling conflicted or dissatisfied with the outcomes of their work can reduce a delegate's overall job satisfaction and motivation.

Altered Perception and Behavior

To reduce dissonance, delegates might change their perceptions or attitudes. This could lead to rationalizing certain decisions, adjusting personal beliefs, or even experiencing a shift in their commitment to the mission.

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

Professional Support and Counselling Access to psychological support and counseling can help delegates process their experiences and manage dissonance.

Training and Preparation

Adequate training in ethical decision-making and cultural competence can prepare delegates to handle conflicts more effectively.

Organizational Support:

Strong organizational policies that address ethical dilemmas and provide clear guidance can help mitigate dissonance.

Peer Support

Debriefing sessions and peer support groups can provide a platform for delegates to discuss their experiences and reduce feelings of isolation.

Reflective Practices

Encouraging reflective practices, such as journaling or peer discussions, can help delegates process their experiences and reconcile conflicting emotions.

Strengthening personal resilience

Building personal resilience through mindfulness, stress management techniques, and maintaining a work-life balance can help delegates cope with the demands of their role.

Cognitive dissonance is a significant psychological challenge for humanitarian delegates, arising from the complex and often conflicting nature of their work. Addressing it requires a combination of personal coping strategies and robust organizational support to ensure delegates can continue their crucial work effectively while maintaining their mental well-being.

Stress management by Humanitarian Organizations

What follows are a few examples of stress management by leading Humanitarian Organizations such as the ICRC, MFS and IFRC. All three humanitarian organizations are aware of the risk of work stress on their Delegates and are developing meaningful methods to limit the impact of work stress.

ICRC

ICRC has a team of psychologists and human

resource specialists who are aware of the risk of how stress could impact the well-being of ICRC delegates and affect the care of the victims. They study the risk of stress and publish related articles and manuals (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, 2016)⁽¹⁷⁾. The current wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen are causing very serious stress to the humanitarian organization and their delegates, especially when attacks and killings of humanitarian workers, for instance in Gaza, is a reality. The work-related stress is further aggravated by the financial cut-backs of ICRC's budget which led to layoffs of delegates adding job insecurity to the already embedded high operational stress.

To adapt to the countless stressors forced upon delegates in the modern era of humanitarian work, the ICRC has worked to update its staff support system to include the psychosocial aid expected from an organization of its caliber. To do so, the ICRC has implemented measures such as psychosocial support programs for field workers, including specialized staff-specific mental health and psychological support delegates, training programs to teach relaxation and de stressing methods as well as delegation outings to connect delegates and to build team rapport ⁽²⁾⁽¹⁸⁾.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) (MSF)

MSF appears proactive in the field of psychosocial support and treatment for its staff. The organization works to offer a wide array of resources, including mobile "Psychosocial Care Units" (PSCUs) that work to provide mental health support to staff globally ⁽¹⁹⁾. Units are designed and led by experts originating from the geographic area they support, allowing them to more effectively combat local issues. The organization's psycho-education training helps to inform staff about what to expect from postings, potential physical and emotional reactions, and maladaptive coping mechanisms ⁽¹⁹⁾.

This works parallel to the Peer Support Network, an online forum for MSF employees where delegates can exchange messages, past experiences, and news, serving as a means for tenured members to support new and incoming staff ⁽²⁰⁾. Additionally, MSF provides external counseling sessions, up to

twenty sessions a year, for staff members who need them (19). These services make MSF one of the more progressive humanitarian organizations when battling mental health crises.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

The IFRC has also offered support to its staff in case of stress reactions to fluid working conditions as described in previous sections of this article. To better handle such unstable contextual environment and ensuing negative impact, they have an occupational health, safety and well-being unit. IFRC workers are mandated to provide support to populations facing environmental disasters and catastrophes. Rescue operations and humanitarian support tend to take place under highly unstable circumstances, with logistic difficulties and with large number of casualties and highly vulnerable survivors. Staff were often working long hours with little breaks in order to save more lives. To "protect" their staff, IFRC have a burn-out prevention program and make a distinction between stresses that occurs at headquarters versus stress experienced in the field.

IFRC offers training in mental health awareness which includes good examples of coping with stress and advice to ensure a good work life balance. The IFRC has stress counsellors in five key zones of the world. They meet with all new delegates and explain what institutional psychosocial support is available to them. These professionals collect data, record general observations of psychosocial conditions of the staff and reflect on the evolution of work-related stressors through their annual report.

IFRC partners with other international agencies and contribute to the regularly updated guidelines of the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC) who publishes the Guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings that provides valuable information to organizations and individuals on how to respond appropriately during humanitarian emergencies (IASC Guidelines on Mental Health, 2007).

Overall, outdate notions of mental health were maintained within humanitarian work until the 2010s, and only workers having suffered the most

traumatic of experiences were offered counseling. "We used to say that you'd earned your psychological debriefing if you'd been kidnapped. It had to be hardcore though: being held up on the road was not enough," said an MSF psychologist reflecting on the situation (Joxe & Veilleux, 2023). With the evolving complexity of conflicts and a greater appreciation for mental health that accompanied the turn of the 21st century, recognition of stress among humanitarian workers has shifted from something of a taboo to an issue of immediate importance, at least within the leading organizations, such as MSF, ICRC and IFRC. Nevertheless, more progress could be made, as we explain in the recommendations below.

Recommendations

Drawing on the research and data described above, the following recommendations are made to provide suggestions to strengthen humanitarian organizations' policies to reduce stress and support the psycho-social well-being of delegates and workers.

Recommendation 1

Psychosocial services should be reinforced similarly to the functioning of the MSF's psychosocial units. More robust support mechanisms, particularly intraoffice support originating from the head delegates in close cooperation with the local staff would allow the Humanitarian Organizations retain team cohesion and prevent the social fractures which occur when delegates over utilize social media as their primary outlet for trauma or stress release.

Recommendation 2

Delegates should be helped to understand the causes of challenges of stress they may face in the field. A concrete understanding of excessive stress, destructive coping mechanisms, and cognitive dissonance and their side effects is necessary for all field-bound delegates to help the delegate's better cope with the inevitable stressors that are part of the humanitarian work. Staff should be jointly educated on how to aid coworkers if such problems arise during an assignment and once stress symptoms are appearing. Cognitive dissonance, as the most compromising and least understood of these issues, must be addressed systematically from an organizational standpoint.

Recommendation 3

A very important task concerning stress mitigation rests with the chiefs of regional offices be they MSF, ICRC, IFRC or other humanitarian organizations. They should understand the psychological dimension of stress, not only the bodily fatigue reaction to overwork. It is the responsibility of the head of an office to identify delegates at risk of psychological burnout or PTSD and come to their support on a one-to-one basis but also organize the team at work in a way that they can support a delegate in distress. This requires adequate pre-mission training of the delegates. It also requires differentiating between using digital social support networks (e.g., delegates retreating into their rooms to engage in digital networking after difficult prison visits) compared to supportive physical community on site, that could offer emotional and moral support a fellowdelegates struggling with stress.

Recommendation 4

Humanitarian organizations are often the first employer of young delegates. In addition, a majority of the new delegates have little or no experience in humanitarian protection and relief work. The human resource practices of humanitarian organizations should be broadened and their hiring pool be diversified and widened by age and experience of its employees. Such a broader HR policy would not only be beneficial for the mental health of the historically young staff but also ensure that humanitarian e organizations do not have to face delegates suffering from burnout often resulting in higher labor turnover rates which can deprive humanitarian organizations from much-needed knowledge and know-how.

Conclusion

Recognizing the psychological toll of their work, humanitarian organizations have to find ways to cope with the inevitable stress which is part of the humanitarian work in the field. Programs need to be implemented to equip delegates with coping mechanisms. These include stress management training, access to mental health professionals, and strong peer support networks. Encouraging open communication about the emotional impact of their experiences is crucial for fostering a culture of resilience within the humanitarian organizations.

The mental well-being of Humanitarian Delegates in general is not just the concern of the respective humanitarian organization whether ICRC, IFRC MSF or other organizations working in war torn parts of the world. Governments, donors, and the public all have a role to play. Continued support for these humanitarian organizations allows them to provide the best possible care for their delegates. Recognizing the sacrifices of these individuals and advocating for their safety can help alleviate some of the burden they carry.

Despite the immense burden they carry, Humanitarian Delegates persevere, driven by a commitment to alleviate suffering and to uphold human dignity. By acknowledging the challenges they face and prioritizing their well-being, we ensure they can continue their vital work as beacons of hope in the darkest of times. Their unwavering dedication in the face of immense stress serves as a powerful testament to the enduring power of humanity and compassion.

Finally, there is a need for further research on delegates' stress levels, their cause-effect linkages, and the delegates' adaptive capabilities. A thorough study followed by corresponding remedial action could help decrease the delegates' current stress levels, increase their job satisfaction and job performance, and consequently further improve the protection they can offer to POWs, to political detainees, and to civilian populations suffering under situations of armed conflict. Such studies could help better identify the competence requirements and personal adaptability that could withstand multiple stressors and in ever changing humanitarian contexts while delivering performance results. Managing personal stress effectively may be the most important characteristic or strength of a gualified humanitarian aid worker of the 21st century.

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