

Reflection on CSW65 – Chloé Grimes Jones, Youth Representative

Thankful to serve another term as an UN Youth Representative for World Federation, I engaged in the CSW65 Side Panel Discussion: Empowerment for Adolescent Girls Beyond COVID-19 organized by UNICEF, ODI, and Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE).

A positive introduction to this panel discussion was when the co-host Prerna Banati presented the idea that adolescent girls are an “acceleration population with the potential to transform their respective nations and societies”. She remarked that part of empowering young girls and adolescents is to diverge from the “victimhood narrative” that girls should not be perceived as “weak or in need of protection” and instead direct focus on “skill-set, self-efficacy, and resilience.” She shared a diagram that described 4 domains of making Girl Intentional Approaches effective: Adolescent Assets (e.g. individual knowledge and skill-sets), Girls Agency (fostering goal-setting and self-efficacy habits), Enabling Environment (e.g. responsive and community safety services), and Networks and Opportunities. These components have been difficult to implement particularly in circumstances with lack of resources particularly in low- to middle income areas.

One highlight to this panel was discussion of challenges adolescent girls face in the Jordanian context, panelist Kenan Madi brought attention to an emerging challenge- a gap in digital access (e.g. internet and technological devices) though in general not a new phenomenon the divide has become more exacerbated between girls and boys in this current COVID-19 pandemic environment. Interesting statistics included: Girls in Jordan and other areas in the Middle East have less access to internet devices. One study found girls are about 43% less likely to have phones and 17% less likely to have internet access. As an educator myself, I resonated with this issue because I have witnessed the impact a digital divide can have towards children’s and adolescents’ educational advances in a hybrid or remote learning environment. Limited access to internet connected devices and/ or tech skills has caused inconsistent schooling routine and absenteeism across New York and other areas in the United States. This vulnerability can at times be exacerbated amongst families that have limited English proficiencies in a generally English dominant school environment. An initiative Mr. Medi mentioned that is addressing this divide is a mechanics program distributing 15,000 tablets with internet access evenly between girl and boy adolescent populations.

Another interesting highlight was when UN Women Representative Selin Ozunaldim mentioned her involvement in initiating a Girls Who Code club in her school in Turkey. This program encourages adolescent girls to become involved in the STEM field such as computer science. Did you know that the biggest loss of interest in STEM for girls occurs between the ages 13 and 17? The current percentage of women involved in the STEM fields has declined from slightly above 30% to around 24%. These were two additionally surprising statistics I learned that showed both the progressions and regressions we as separate nations have made towards empowering and granting equal rights/access to young girls and women. I am inspired by the work of the Sustainable Development Goals, NGOs and activists that we are on the right path towards gender equity.