

THE STOCKHOLM FORUM ON GENDER EQUALITY

DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION – DOUBLE POSSIBILITY – THE REALITY FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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OVERVIEW

Adolescent girls are facing double discrimination – both based on their gender and based on their age. In the brand new Champions of Change documentary, we followed Roxana in Colombia, Joy in Uganda and Encya in East Timor and take in their stories of growing up as girls in a patriarchal world. The film screening was followed by a panel discussion on the situation for adolescent girls in the world.

KEY TAKEWAYS

Where are we?

A lot of girls face discrimination because they are girls and because they are young, which makes them subject to double discrimination. We see that girls' rights are not yet human rights despite women's rights being recognised as human rights in the Vienna declaration of human rights from 1993. Today most of the population is young, and half of them are girls. There has been a lot of resistance in including specific rights of girls in the CEDAW convention as well as in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Due to this resistance girls are almost invisible in international human rights conventions such as CRW and CEDAW. Instead of being focused upon as a specific group in society, they are linked together with women and/or children's rights. Girls' access to rights is shaped by their value, position, and power relative to others. We need to give them economic independence, a fair start in life, promote active citizenship and empowerment.

The documentary Champions of change tackles the problems of early marriages and early pregnancies, forced marriages, family (gender-based) violence, the perception by girls of their own sexuality, body and romantic relationships, etc.

Adolescent girls are often more vulnerable than boys as they are not allowed to make decisions concerning their own life – mainly for structural and/or cultural reasons. Boys are being prioritised by parents in the process of deciding which of the siblings should be allowed education and to what extent.

In these communities there are almost no systems available to help adolescent girls to continue with their education or earn money from their work. Usually it's young women

working for older males in their families. Women activists trying to drive change as well as leaders of support groups are to a large extent seen as 'bad women'.

What are we doing?

Large parts of the African community see young women as assets, which makes life an everyday struggle for many of these young women. African feminism is not documented but it's very relevant – even though the mechanisms of patriarchy are similar all over the world. Roxanna in the documentary film was open about her sexuality, but this can't be done in many of the African countries. You need to 'wait until you get married'. In the film, Joy from Uganda was left alone with nobody to support her in her struggle and difficult situation. Joy was a victim of early marriage, but since this is normalised by society, the challenge for her is even bigger, with her lacking support and understanding from those around her.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Where do we go from here?

We lack intergenerational support for young feminist activists. Laws and government structures are tailored for men and overlook women – and to an even larger extent, young women. A way forward would be to give women more opportunities to participate in government bodies.

It is important to globalise the struggle of women's rights as the issues often are shared across borders – even while the context may differ. We should support organically growing local movements rather than someone creating movements from the outside – or from the top down. We should also open more possibilities for young girls to speak up, encourage them to protect themselves (for example with the help of self-defence lessons), work on the solidarity between women, sharing stories and experiences with each other, speak up about violence in families.

The right to information and to education is crucial. Girls need to be prepared for the shock of backlash. Feminists get victimised in their communities, but we should learn or continue to portray them as true sources of inspiration. It would be good to create safe spaces where girls and young women could come and talk about relevant issues.

The change needs to be supported by men. It is of great importance to create alliances with men as they have access to much of the power, both locally and on a broader level.

We also need a common political agenda for children's and women's organisations. Advocacy need to be built on all levels, including among donor organisations. Today many of the female ministers and MPs don't support the task even though it may be expected of them. This needs to be changed.

Give more power and voice to African feminists in order for feminism not to be seen as a remote and alien phenomenon. ■

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