

THE STOCKHOLM FORUM ON GENDER EQUALITY

# SHE DECIDES – AND THE WORLD GETS SMARTER, STRONGER AND SAFER

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## OVERVIEW

Human rights include the right to decide freely over your own body, sexuality and reproduction. Absence or presence of these rights can mean the difference between life and death for a young girl. One woman or girl still dies every two minutes from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth. But sexual and reproductive health and rights is also intricately linked to women's and girls' full enjoyment of other human rights, such as the rights to education, work and health, as well as areas such as political participation.

When women are empowered, so are families and their future children. Communities and nations are empowered. Ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all will have a direct impact on the possibilities of achieving many of the targets in the 2030 Agenda.

The round table shared experiences and best practices from the empowerment of women and girls as well as discussed how the work can be taken further.

## KEY TAKEWAYS

### Where are we?

She Decides is a global movement that has recently started in Brussels with different stakeholders involved in order to give voice to women, make them stand up and speak out. She Decides raises the question about what it means if you can't decide about your own body or if you can't be part of decisions about the society that you live your life in.

Today, over 62 million girls in the world can't go to school for a number of reasons. Two thirds of the women and girls have no access to school. If young girls get pregnant, they cannot go to school due to the stigma of child pregnancy but also for cultural, structural and other reasons. For girls between the age of 10–18, HIV infection is ten times higher than for boys in the same age group – this is because a lot of girls are victims of rape.

Two thirds of women are hungry even though half of them work with producing food. Women and girls are restricted from wearing the clothes that they want, accessing public spaces and

even walking the streets when or where they want – and if they do, women and girls are in many cases likely to be subject to harassment. These structures and the world order of male dominance is sustained by men in positions of power.

Agenda 2030 is an instrument to eradicate poverty and gender inequality. The idea that women should have access to equal rights, just as any human being, is fundamental. Young people are leading this fight.

Reproductive health and rights are fundamental for gender equality.

### **What are we doing?**

**Sweden** was one of the poorest countries in Europe a hundred years ago. Eighty years ago, the Swedish government lifted the ban on information on contraceptives. Today this information is subsidised, and contraceptive education is compulsory in all schools. The Swedish government invests in public child care so mothers, as well as fathers, have equal access to employment and the labour market. Women have the right to safe abortion, and men have the right to participate in upbringing their children, mainly through paid parental leave subsidised by the state. Today, women participate fully in the labour market and many men – as well as women - engage in the struggle for gender equality and equal rights. Without women deciding over their own bodies, they can't participate in the labour market.

In **Liberia**, women are included in leadership positions in the government, and male politicians advocate ending violence against women. There is an executive order by the president to stop female genital mutilation. Advocacy is very important, especially by giving a voice to women. The Bring Back Our Girls movement has started to oppose Boko Haram. Current strategies adopted by the Liberian government and key factors for enhanced gender equality are: access to education – both technical and vocational training, access to resources for women to start businesses, increased women business ownership, increase of women's co-ownership in heritage legislation.

In **Poland**, Gals4Gals advocate against laws which ban abortions, and 4,000 people in Poland were mobilised to stop the Polish government to implement the ban on abortion. Women who participated did not know each other before, nor did they have experience on how to organise themselves around an issue. However, it was enough to know what they wanted to achieve, and from there they mobilised other people. The protests and marches helped to mobilise people and create a call for action. People were building trust through these activities, which was very positive, especially since Poland is a country with the lowest trust levels in Europe. Seven women from Gals4Gals were running in the local elections for the first time to make their voices heard.

In the **Philippines**, sharing stories about sexual harassment allows young women to not feel alone. Young people use social media activism to do so. These stories also bridge the gap between younger and older people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Where do we go from here?

- (-) Involving the private sector, stakeholders and facilitating community engagement is crucial to get the correct feedback in order to make the right priorities and manage progress more effectively. Key has been to work hard to reduce cost for cities by improving partnerships between the private, public and people.
- (-) How do we move from 'She Does Not Decide' to 'She Decides'? We share one humanity and we should approach this question from a humanity perspective. Gender is about everyone – it is not about men or women, it is for everybody. If the life of women would be better, the life of men would also improve. Young men should – and need to – become a part of the solution. Wounding women or men through expectation and stereotypes is unacceptable (women – sexually attractive, men – macho).
- (-) We need to take measures to stop women from dying while giving birth. Information and services need to be provided to both women and men. Misinformation is a root cause of gender inequality.
- (-) We need to strengthen capacity building, improve sexual and reproductive education, and be inclusive. There are gaps in skills and behaviours within institutions that deliver services. Moreover, women are often stigmatised when they want to access these services. Muslim women and women in/from conflict areas are especially vulnerable. Socio-economic status as well as ethnicity/cultural structures play an important role in how much access a woman may have to information and knowledge and what possibilities she might have in society.
- (-) More women in politics are needed. Women should run in local elections make their voices heard, as well as be engaged in political life in all spheres of society.
- (-) A happy, healthy and pleasurable sexuality should be the right of all men and women alike.
- (-) Programmes should be sensitive to different situations: (a) need to focus on the needs of 'the other' 50 per cent of humanity – women; (b) and make sure to follow up on programmes from the beginning to the end of implementation.
- (-) We need to respect each other, no matter whether one is a woman or a man.
- (-) Addressing women's health, sexual and reproductive, is a way to a safe and sustainable life.
- (-) We need to mobilise young people and let them raise their voice.
- (-) We need to build partnership to clear space for girls and women.
- (-) At times, it is important to work locally while at other times it is important to work on a global and international level
- (-) Encourage everyone to join the movement on gender equality and equal rights - and be a part of She Decides.
- (-) Get yourself a feminist government!

(-) Make abortion safe again! ■

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