



# **CSW Chair Report**

Topic 1: Implementing Sustainable Development Initiatives to Empower Women in Rural Communities of Sub-Saharan Africa

**Chair: Emilie Yeh**

**Deputy Chair: Victoria Kress**

## **Personal Statements**

### **Chair – Emilie Yeh**

Honourable Delegates,

I am currently in 10th grade at ACS International School Hillingdon. I am French, Danish, Taiwanese and British and am honoured to be your chair of the Commission on the Status of Women at this forthcoming annual session of MUNISS alongside my lovely deputy chair Victoria Kress. I attended my first conference in grade 9 last year and have since attended 2 other conferences including THIMUN this January. We hope to keep the debates fruitful and keep you all motivated.

I look forward to meeting you all!



### **Deputy Chair – Victoria Kress**

Honourable delegates,

I'm Victoria Kress, I'm 14 years old and in 9<sup>th</sup> grade at International School of Stuttgart. I'm British and German. This will be my 4<sup>th</sup> MUN conference, but first time as chair. I'm really looking forward to meeting new people at the conferences and being deputy chair to Emilie.

I can't wait to listen to some interesting debates and fill up the gossip box with you guys!



# Introduction

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) face many difficulties hindering them from reaching their full potential. Lack of education, bad healthcare options, unfairly paid work, child marriage, teen pregnancy, and barely any measures against gender-based violence (GBV), are all factors to high rates of gender inequality in the countries. By empowering women, there can be a significant reduction in these issues.

Empowering women includes equal access to education, the promotion of economic opportunities and entrepreneurship, improved healthcare services, stronger law enforcement regarding GBV, challenging sexist social norms and stereotypes, and introducing support networks.

## Glossary

**Gender-based violence (GBV)** is harmful actions directed at an individual based on their gender. It includes physical, sexual, or mental harm and can be present in domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment, and other forms of mistreatment.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

**Child Marriage** refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.

## Issue Explanation

The issue of women's unfair treatment in SSA is largely a violation of human rights, and an obstacle to the 17 UN Goals, specifically Goal 5: Gender equality. Problems such as social stigma or undeveloped economics contribute to the lack of education for young girls and women, which allows the underlying issue of the lack of female empowerment to continue, as women are not aware of their full potential and don't stand up for themselves. We can sort the main causes of this issue into separate categories: Discriminating family constructs, restricted medical resources, and restricted body autonomy. If we look at the discriminatory family constructs, we can identify these issues:

- The legal age of marriage. Depending on the country, the age of marriage varies. In most countries in SSA the legal age of marriage is 21, 18 or 15. (TACPF, 2013) However there are often loopholes to these laws, like approval from a parent or minister. This often leads to child marriages, which deprive young girls of their human rights and has a large effect on the authority that married children have over their body and health.
- The preference and favouritism of sons over daughters. Families in SSA often prefer to have sons due to the cultural belief that they are financially independent, as opposed to daughters who are to become their future husband's "property", which is why sons often inherit more than their sisters.



When finances are an issue, families also prefer to send their sons to school, as they believe they will be more successful, which leaves daughters at home to take care of the household or get married off.

Moving into the restricted medical resources category, these are the main problems that require solving:

- The poor quality of feminine healthcare. There are only 0.2 professionally trained doctors for every 1.000 people in SSA, (Wonder, 2020) and that number decreases when focusing only on women's health. Along with a lack of medical equipment and medication, there is a huge inaccessibility for women to find help when faced with an issue. Another problem is the negative stigma around the topic that women faced when they try get help. Women's health has been seen as a very negative and mysterious thing over the past centuries, and this still has an impact on all societies today, projecting particularly on uneducated regions such as SSA. This all adds up to very limited help for women to get checked and given medical assistance.
- The lack of medical assistance during childbirth. As discussed in the topic above, there are only a few professional doctors or midwives to help deliver a baby and help during complications. Often it is a mother, grandmother, or other female relative helping to deliver a baby. 545 in every 100.000 mothers die. during live birth, and many more die after, due to complications. This is the highest maternal death rate than anywhere else in the world.

Finally, looking into the restricted body autonomy that women have in SSA, we can determine these (number) main issues:

- The outdated tradition of FGM. Female genital mutilation is a long-standing tradition that has now been proven to not provide any benefits, on the contrary, it causes more health problems, such as severe pain or hemorrhages further along in a woman's life. It has been ruled as a violation to human rights, yet over 3 million young girls are in danger of FGM every year. (WHO,2024)
- Gender-based violence. Women in SSA are often victims to GBV as there are almost no measures to protect the women, and a large stigma around the victims speaking up and defending themselves.
- Teen pregnancy. With a connection to child marriage and GBV, teen pregnancy is a reoccurring problem, with over 6 million girls aged 10-19 falling pregnant (Maharaj, 2022), it is an issue that interferes with their education and health.

All of these factors contribute to the lack of education for young girls and women in SSA. They are all individually wrong, and failure to address them will result in serious global consequences. Economic stagnation, social instability and the reduced proceeding with the UN goals are some examples.

The empowerment of women isn't difficult to introduce, simply providing them more support to stand up for themselves, educating women and men alike on how women deserve to be treated and supplying them with necessary legal, medical, and educational resources will push them towards empowering themselves. Ways this



could be done, is through education programs, offering classes to women about their health, to women and men on women's rights and how to apply them, to children on existing peacefully with people of opposite genders and teaching them more about reproductive health and people's rights. Another way to empower women in SSA is by setting up or supporting programs to provide correct medical care to women. The doctors should be correctly trained in how to help mothers give birth, how to determine reproductive illnesses listen to the women in need of help and provide support to those who aren't brave enough to seek it. The doctors should also have access to enough medical devices or medicines, so they can aid women to their full ability. The final example of how women could be empowered is by setting up stronger laws regarding child marriage, FGM, and GBV. These laws would then have to be enforced, by strengthening the police force and justice system, this would be possible. Providing women with officials who will listen to them and do their best to protect them and serve them justice will encourage women to speak up about injustice in their lives and provide women with a louder voice and ultimately, more confidence.

## History of the Topic

The past is notorious for gender inequality no matter where you go. Sub-Saharan Africa is no different. Although African women were a very valued part of society, there has always been a certain patriarchal structure present. This was then further encouraged when Africa was colonized in the early 1800's. European societal structures were very patriarchal, and this influenced the colonized countries greatly. (Guglielmo, 2021) During the struggle for independence from colonizers, women played a large part in the protests and political movement, but a lot of their contribution was overlooked or minimized in historical narratives. After the newly won independence, women still faced struggles they faced during the period of colonization, because of how much had stayed with the people of SSA. In the past decades however, there has been an increase in victims of GBV and other sorts of discrimination towards women in SSA.

## Any Previous Attempts

### **The Corus International**

An organization introduced over five decades ago that targets GBV, women's health, girls' education, challenging social family norms, and educating on the importance of the coexistence of women and men.

### **UN Women**

The UN women have organized workshops for police officers in South Africa and other countries to learn how to deal with cases of GBV correctly, to create a safer space for women, and bring justice to victims. This empowers women by giving them a voice and a way to free themselves.



## **FAWE Gender Responsive Pedagogy**

FAWE is a program that equips teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes to empower girls in the classroom and encourage the equal treatment of women and men. It teaches both boys and girls from a young age the needs and rights of the opposite gender, and how to coexist peacefully and respect each other.

## **Involved Parties**

### **South Africa**

A country in SSA, South Africa has worryingly high numbers when it comes to GBV and a lack of education for women. The government has opened itself up to creating a better balance between the two genders, but most of the country's population and culture are very conservative.

### **Nigeria**

Another country in SSA, Nigeria has concerning rules regarding assets, parental rights, and domestic violence. The government has taken minimal measures, but again, the culture and societal norms overrule the law.

### **NGO's**

Non-profit organizations such as MEWC or the Asante Africa Foundation are working towards improving women's situation in SSA. MEWC did this between 2010 and 2020 by advocating for policy changes and holding institutions accountable for actions violating women's rights. (MEWC, 2020) The Asante Africa Foundation empowers women by encouraging the education of young girls in SSA and providing them with skills and opportunities. (Asante, 2023)

### **UNDP**

The UNDP committee encourages and supports the development of women rising economically. They do this by teaching women skills in entrepreneurship and offering financial support to get women's businesses started. This empowers women by providing them with similar opportunities as would usually be provided to men, balancing not only the gender pay gap but also the workforce and giving women the confidence to do things that are usually classified as men's jobs.

## **Media Contribution**

SSA is one of the parts of the world that often ignored of and not given much attention to. However, it is widely agreed across the media spectrum in the area that women should share the same rights as men. But unfortunately, when coming across a rare video from SSA about a young 16-year-old with twins (Tusaiweyana,2024), there was quite a negative backlash. Commentors asked why she wouldn't just get an abortion, why she ruined her life by having kids, why she and her mother were celebrating her going back to school. Then they found out she was raped, that the healthcare in SSA is very poor, only around 33% of women have access to any form of birth control and that she will face a lot of negativities for coming back after having children, at a school



consisting of more males than females. It is important that cases like these get more attention in the media to raise awareness about it and advocate for a shift in the public, not only in the target countries, but all over the globe.

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