

SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGION – BREAK AWAY SESSIONS REPORTING

1. Malawi Group- report by Kimberly

The group focused on disability and the access to resources on girls and with disabilities. They reported that in Liberia most girls with disability are prone to abuse and are discriminated against even though they believe that disability is not inability. They further highlighted that these girls are in need of counselling services for what they came across. Tanaka from South Africa submitted that girls with disabilities need more education opportunities even though the community judges them and is not so supportive.

Fari from Zimbabwe highlighted that girls with disabilities are faced with infrastructural challenges where most buildings do not have ramps. She said there is also a challenge with sign language appreciation and she recommended the need for a mandatory solution to be put in place. The group also recommended an interactive and constantly updated database for persons with disabilities to be put in place. The group further recommended that the governments should make funds available and also partner with other stakeholders such as UNICEF for the protection of girls with disabilities.

2. South Africa Group

The group focused on the impact of COVID 19 on young girls. The group reported that most women and girls lost their sources of income during Covid 19 since they had mainly been engaged in the informal sector. The lock down regulations restricted them to care work which is unpaid.

In South Africa, most people survive on formal jobs and not subsistence farming and therefore the lock down had an impact on young women who ended up losing their jobs.

Food insecurity affected young women who were on ARVs since they could not take their medication without having food. There were institutions which distributed food during the COVID period but for some it came with some abuse in exchange for food. There was a lot of corruption in the distribution and some girls fell pregnant because of this.

Young school going girls' access to education was affected. Some could not afford online lessons due to various circumstances such as lack of data, internet, and gadgets. Some girls ended up dropping out of school and became caregivers.

During COVID- 19, a number of institutions were closed or were not fully operational such that survivors of GBV could not access much needed services. Institutions such as the police were deployed at road blocks leaving the stations unattended, clinics were giving priority to COVID-19 patients at the expense of other patients including sexually abused girls. Contraceptive services were not a priority and as a result there was high prevalence of pregnancy cases.

Termination of pregnancy was another challenge since a number of countries save for South Africa, termination is illegal. Young girls ended up using back door service providers to terminate their pregnancies which claimed lives of many.

3. The Eswatini group

The group focused on challenges of COVID -19 on accessing online lessons. The group reported that some girls in Zimbabwe could not access online lessons because of resource limitations.

The group reported that in Eswatini there was an inequality gap on areas to do with the economy. Fewer women were reported to be working in the formal sector. Furthermore those in the informal sector were forced to stop their means of survival pushing most women into the poverty affected group.

Eswatini was reported to have a culture called *intwala* which discriminated against women and girls. Because of this culture young girls have been abused and abducted.

The group highlighted that young women need to position themselves in positions of decision making so that they can contribute to their empowerment agenda, since their participation is a challenge in most African countries. Young women should be involved in all processes.

4. Zimbabwe group

The group's main focus was on challenges that young women face due to harmful cultural practices. These include sexual abuse and child marriages. The group interrogated the issue by answering a question why young girls do not open up when faced with such abuse.

The group agreed that unfair and inaccessible legal systems contribute to not reporting, where police usually do not follow up cases. In some cases those who are supposed to protect victims end up abusing them. It was mentioned that during COVID -19 those who were manning road blocks would abuse young girls in order for them to pass.

Culture was another hindrance which was raised. Young girls could not take leadership positions since they are perceived as not capable. Those who try to are viewed as prostitutes.

Poverty was also raised as a reason for not reporting. Some girls could not afford to buy sanitary pads and therefore encourage each other to learn how to make their own pads.