

THINKING GLOBAL, ACTING LOCAL: LEARNING FROM LOCAL STORIES OF RESILIENCE AND ACTION

Curated Discussion Report #4 - Final Report

JUNE 2021



INTRODUCTION

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) is a global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France in close partnership with civil society. Starting in Mexico City from the 29th to 31st of March, and culminating in Paris, from 30th June to 2nd July, the Forum launched a set of concrete, ambitious and transformative actions to achieve immediate and irreversible progress towards gender equality.

In order to build momentum for the Forum and engage a diverse network of gender activists from across the world, the GEF Secretariat held a series of Curated Discussions from September 2020 until June 2021, bringing together over 600 stakeholders from different constituencies. On the 1st and 3rd of June 2021, the fourth and final Curated Discussion was held, focusing on the topic: “Thinking Global, Acting Local: Learning from Local Stories of Resilience and Action”. The purpose of the Curated Discussion initiative was to cultivate insights and contributions around key topics surrounding the GEF. The insights synthesized in this report fed into the design and the outcomes of the Forum.

The final Curated Discussion drew on storytelling as a technique for generating change at different societal levels, and featured stories of resilience and action in different contexts, exploring the role of key actors to create enabling environments that lead to lasting change. Speakers were chosen based on their stories as relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic and their alignment with the GEF, as well as the themes of the Action Coalitions - Gender-Based Violence (GBV); Economic Justice and Rights; Feminist Action for Climate Justice; Bodily Autonomy and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; Technology and Innovation For Gender Equality; Feminist Movements and Leadership – and also the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action.

The content of this report is drawn from the plenary and breakout group discussions across both sessions, highlighting themes and summarizing key recommendations shared by participants on how storytelling is a powerful tool to foster tangible, lasting change and how global thinking can be translated into concrete action at the local level.



PLENARY SESSION

Intergenerational Dialogue

The Curated Discussion opened with an intergenerational dialogue between diverse speakers. Drawing on storytelling techniques, the panelists first told their personal stories as related to gender equality and then elaborated on how storytelling can advance gender equality and how to connect local change with global shifts in power. Participants had the opportunity to engage with the speakers by submitting questions via the chat function, some of which were answered throughout the conversation.

Session A Speakers: 1 June 2021



Mia Gary

12-year-old girl guide,
Malaysia



**Norma Palacios
Trabamala**

Representative of the Sindicato Nacional de
Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar (1st
Mexican Workers Union)



**Gerel
Dondovdorj**

President of the Mongolian
National Federation of the
Blind



**Sevidzem
Ernestine Leikeki**

Chair of the board & Head of the Gender
Department of Cameroon Gender and
Environment Watch (CAMGEW)

Session B Speakers: 3 June 2021



Jaha Dukureh

Gambian human rights activist and
anti-female genital mutilation (FGM)
campaigner; UN Women Goodwill
Regional Ambassador for Africa



Cearlovev Granali

18-year-old girl guide,
youth leader and advocate
from the Philippines



Malak Swed

Member of the board of Tamas
Syrian Civil Society Coalition,
researcher, theater critic and
journalist



**Stephanie Alexandra
Altamirano Herrera**

Ecuadorian activist fighting to end sexual
violence against women (part of the
network of Sexual Violence Survivors,
Acompañantes en Red and the Network
for Abortion Las Comadres. Started the
campaign, Seremos las últimas / We will
be the last ones)

PERSONAL STORIES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND STORYTELLING

The session opened with a round of personal stories about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Speakers touched upon themes such as GBV, rape culture and impunity, unpaid care work, and the importance of including women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of political, social and economic life among others. The stories gave a first-hand insight into the power of storytelling to create a space for reflection and solidarity. The interventions have been captured in full in the Annex of this report, which we encourage you to explore. Some powerful quotes included:

MIA GARY

"In my school in Malaysia, our mathematics teacher gave us a lesson about sexual harassment. He explained us that the law protects us until we reach the age of 18, so as a joke, he started saying: 'You boys, if you want to rape, make sure the girl is over 18 years old'. I was so shocked! When I got back home, I posted a video on the social networks to tell what happened and it went viral."

NORMA PALACIOS TRABAMALA

"My story is the story of a domestic worker who has been working for 27 years, but only recognized her own value 7 years ago. I attended training sessions in Mexico and that made me realize that I am a worthy and courageous woman. Then I met other women who like me experienced problems as domestic workers and together we decided to start a process of fighting for our rights through a trade union."

GEREL DONDOVDORJ

"I was a 20-year-old university student when I lost my sight. One morning, I woke up and I realized that my eyes could not see anymore... Sometimes I think that this world is made for sighted persons. We, as visually-impaired people, we face many challenges to participate in the society on an equal basis. Now, as a blind woman, I have a dream: I want to see this world, including my country, Mongolia, inclusive for everyone, especially persons with disabilities."

SEVIDZEM ERNESTINE LEIKEKI

"For an entire generation, forest regeneration has been a male-dominated sector. With my team of young people from CAMGEW Gender department, since 2010, we have been conducting awareness-raising, advocacy and capacity-building activities, to integrate women into the forests' value chain. With their income, women can contribute to the development of their family and the community; they also take care of themselves, so GBV, especially domestic violence, has reduced."

JAHA DUKUREH

"I am a survivor of female genital mutilation – FGM – and I was a child bride twice in my life... I set up an organization called Safe Hands for Girls, that aims at ending FGM, child marriage and all forms of GBV... One of our most effective tools is storytelling, because when I go into a community and I have a conversation with a father, I tell him: 'This is not something that the West is asking me to do, but it is something that I have been through myself'".

GEARLOVEY GRANALI

"One day, I was riding home from school by public transportation when an old drunk man harassed me. It's really painful to be recalling it but what pains me more until this moment is that the people around me did nothing... Until this day, I still wonder what could have been if someone stood up for me? I tell this story not for sympathy nor comfort, but to send a message that violence against women is real. Inequality is real."

MALAK SWED

"I started acting with the civil society during the beginning of the Syrian uprising, in 2011. I organized several workshops and events for the refugees in Lebanon... We help those women refugees to tell their stories and voice their grievances... We would have them stand in front of an audience and they would decide through an interaction with the audience, on a better ending for that story. There was a magical effect to this, a gradual change of mindset on the part of everybody because it was interactive and we were discussing some subconscious issues."

STEPHANIE ALTAMIRANO HERRERA

"I was sexually assaulted in a sport center when I was a child: a place where I went every day from the age of 8 until the age of 11... We decided to launch a campaign and searched for the survivors of the same aggressor, who was actually the coach of this sport center. We found 10 women who were also the victims of this man. With the families we launched a campaign called 'Seremos las últimas' (We will be the last), contacted the media and got together for the Rights Protection Council to close the sports center. When finally, the sticker 'Closed' was put on the door of the sport center, I was very impressed. I could not prevent asking myself if it was a reality."

KEY THEMES OF THE DISCUSSION

THEME 1: THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN SHIFTING THE NARRATIVES AROUND GENDER EQUALITY

How can storytelling be best used to advance gender issues? More specifically, how can the GEF take advantage of storytelling to influence narratives around gender equality? Our speakers reflected on the impact of meaningful and responsible storytelling.

THE NUMEROUS BENEFITS OF STORYTELLING

Mia Gary recalled that storytelling has been used throughout history to pass on core values, teach lessons and provide guidance to future generations. Stories carry more emotional value than abstract accounts, meaning that when people hear stories from the original source they feel more connected to the story and the teller, igniting a connection among people from different communities. Storytelling also offers a space for reflection and provides an opportunity to make what are sometimes considered ‘taboo’ ideas easier to digest.

Cearlovev Granali remarked that through storytelling we can open discussions that expand the scope of gender equality in our communities. Cearlovev imparts her own story to her friends so that they understand that gender equality is not only a matter of getting equal pay and representation, but also the need to address the root causes of gender inequality to end abuse of power, patriarchal norms and systems, and toxic masculinity.

REFLECTION, MASS MOBILIZATION AND ADVOCACY

Norma Palacios Trabamala suggested that we use storytelling to assess where we should be more active. Storytelling helps us identify common goals and distinguish where we need to mobilize actors.

Sevidzem Ernestine Leikeki added that storytelling is a tool for mass mobilization: when women listen to the stories of other women, they feel encouraged to look beyond their own contexts and speak out on rights and issues of all women globally. Storytelling helps climate activists and gender equality stakeholders more broadly discuss, communicate, and keep informed through empathy and common experiences.

Gerel Dondovdorj insisted that storytelling is one of the most powerful tools to present issues to the public as well as decision makers. Women with disabilities should be able to share their stories of unequal access to education, employment opportunities, or reproductive health services. Approximately 20% of women with disabilities never utilize these services due to lack of access, while false stereotypes also negatively impact the way women with disabilities are treated. Going forward,

Gerel hopes that storytelling can be used to change disability-related policies that are not gender-sensitive.

Jaha Dukureh agreed that what drives change is when those in positions of power listen to survivors of violence and young people. Jaha suggested that the GEF could be used as a platform by people on the ground to share their experiences, so that these experiences reach stakeholders who can inform policy and programmatic changes.

Cearlovev Granali called on participants to establish ongoing connections with decision-makers beyond the GEF. It is essential that the stories that are shared and elevated in the context of the Forum are not lost.

MEANINGFUL AND RESPONSIBLE STORYTELLING

Malak Swed pointed to the importance of the form in which stories are shared, highlighting the difference between telling a story in an organic way, versus telling a story intentionally to make an impact. When used to achieve a societal impact, storytelling should be practiced with the help of experts who can teach how to tell them in a way that triggers the desired change.

Stephanie Alexandra Altamirano Herrera added that telling stories for the purpose of transformation involves responsibilities. One story often represents the story of thousands of women and girls around the world who are enduring difficulties. Therefore, telling a story is a responsibility to all of these women and girls.

Storytelling is not just about telling a story.
You also need to be heard by those who
need to hear you, those in power.

Cearlovev Granali

As a blind woman, I have a dream:
I want to see this world inclusive for everyone,
including the persons with disabilities.

Gerel Dondovdorj

THEME 2. HOW STORYTELLING CAN LEAD TO LASTING CHANGE

During the second part of the plenary session, the speakers reflected on the conditions for sustainable change. The speakers discussed potential components of a strategy mobilizing storytelling for progress on gender equality.

A WIDE SET OF TOOLS: FROM DRAMA TO POSTERS

Sevidzem Ernestine Leikeki examined the wide set of tools that could be derived from women's stories. To promote conservation of forests in Cameroon, the use of visual applications was instrumental, such as drama, sketching and drawing stories with children. When working with adults, flyers, posters and booklets can be used in a systematic way to share success stories, ideas and strategies for public use.

Malak Swed stressed that interactive drama may be a way for victims who cannot express their feelings in a direct way to address them, because they will think that what is played on the stage is not their story anymore, but everyone's story.

THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING LASTING CHANGE

According to Stephanie Alexandra Altamirano Herrera, storytelling allows us to build larger and wider social movements. Sexual violence is considered taboo in her society as many still do not believe that sexual aggressions can occur in one's own families or neighbor's houses. Therefore, it is important for survivors to tell their stories to each other in a safe space as a way to educate and mobilize communities.

Jaha Dukureh believes that lasting change requires work at both local and global levels. While collaborating with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to collect statistics on the impact of FGM in the United States, she also kept working with grassroots organizations to deliver services to women survivors and conduct prevention campaigns with Al-Azhar University in Egypt against child marriage. This work helped to inform Obama Administration's focus on the impact of FGM in the United States. Jaha also emphasized the importance of giving power to local communities, grassroots activists, and the survivors themselves to lead change. She explained that the story she shares on the global stage is not necessarily different from the story she shares in local communities, and is what allows her to connect with the people that she tries to serve.

Cearlovey Granali believes that education starts with our own networks, such as friends and family; however, we should not expect agreement to come easily. In the Philippines, harassment and female reproductive health and rights are sensitive topics, meaning opinions will vary greatly. Cearlovey stressed the importance of not silencing stories, persisting, and gaining more allies in advocacy work.



AVOID THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Malak Swed pointed out that we should avoid normalizing violence. She distinguished between the numerous trauma series or movies that reflect violence against women, and the stories that could be shared instead, built on values and results that we would like to achieve. Evil characters and their conduct should be clearly identified, and victims should be seen as positive characters. If we assign the right features to the right characters, we will help to prevent normalizing violence against women.

RESPECT FOR LOCAL ACTORS, THEIR CULTURES AND PRACTICES

Jaha Dukureh highlighted the importance of paying attention to context and what stories mean to local communities, especially when the media is involved. When she started speaking out against FGM and child marriage in the media, her family and community felt that it was a direct attack on them and their culture. Consequently, she had to find a way to present her work in a more respectful way. She observed that when looking at FGM or issues like child marriage, the West and the rest of the world too often label those who commit this barbaric practice as ignorant Africans. Jaha insisted on recognizing that these practices have been around for hundreds of years, because achieving change requires an understanding of the history and local context, rather than acting on stereotypes and attacking the keepers of the traditions.

To get the change, we should not import solutions to the communities, but give power to local actors and survivors. Without this, this is going to be only talk and no action.

Jaha Dukureh



THEME 3. THE FUTURE OF THE GEF & KEY ACTIONS THAT SHOULD FOLLOW

In the last part of the plenary session, the speakers addressed the future of the GEF beyond the Forums in Mexico City and Paris, imagining what the story of the GEF will look like going forward and what key actions stakeholders could be encouraged to follow.

PRIORITIES, VISION AND TRANSPARENCY

Cearlovey Granali stressed that the GEF should not serve as just another assembly or vehicle for drafting blueprints and manifestos; rather the GEF must represent commitment-making and accountability. The GEF should establish priorities and goals that are relatable to the lived realities of people from all different backgrounds and accessible to all. Cearlovey emphasized her expectation for GEF-related work to reflect transparency, including not hiding any failures, setbacks, or challenges.

Mia Gary emphasized that governments need to ensure that laws against GBV, sexual misconduct and those focusing on child protection are enforced and implemented at all levels so that women can feel safe wherever they go. Cearlovey added the need for government leaders to come forth and specify how they are prioritizing gender equality in their countries.

I want to feel safe everywhere I go.

Mia Gary

STRONGER COLLABORATION WITH THE YOUTH

Cearlovey Granali and Mia Gary agreed on the importance of fostering stronger collaborations between youth and older generations, such as through collective projects. Cearlovey hoped that there would be more projects between adult leaders and the youth, since older generations have perspectives that the young people do not have, and vice versa. Cearlovey also expected more support for youth organizations, such as in terms of funding and program development. Both Cearlovey and Mia expressed their hope for capacity-building assistance and an improved quality of education, including through workshops on body positivity and GBV, as well as more students-led activities to empower youth and help them realize their potential.

Mia stressed the importance of introducing political studies from a young age so that students reflect on political concepts and understand their rights. Education should be “human-friendly”, requiring teachers to assist students in acquiring the tools to enhance their physical and emotional wellbeing, rather than solely improving their academic performance.

BREAKOUT GROUPS

Breakout rooms were set up to address key topics pertaining to gender equality and storytelling as a tool to generate change at the local and global level. Participants in breakout rooms were encouraged to suggest concrete recommendations on this topic ahead of the GEF in Paris.



EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS & SAFE SPACES FOR GENERATING LASTING CHANGE

Participants insisted that education is critical to ensuring lasting change. Children may be taught storytelling at school, while educational platforms and apps could also be created following the GEF in order to keep participants active and motivated to make changes and uphold commitments in their own communities. These educational platforms could include spaces reserved for personal expression and networking.

Safe spaces should be provided to women and young people to give them opportunities to speak about the situations they would like to change. Those spaces may also be used for partnerships and networking purposes, to connect with commitment makers for instance.

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES AND RELEVANT TARGETS

Participants recognized that efficient approaches need to be evidence-based in order to design more responsive interventions. It is equally important to carefully choose the stories that we share, given their potential to inform better advocacy campaigns for survivors. Through discussions and stories, communities can implement good practices inspired by others.

Listeners of stories should not be neglected in one's reflection and analysis of storytelling. Identifying the right audience is important to achieve sustainable change. Online campaigns were identified as a key tool to target relevant people and expand networks.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF POLICY-MAKERS

In order for the GEF to trigger lasting change, policymakers should stay informed on the progress in global commitment making and program development. Since monitoring and accountability are the building blocks of effective policies, commitments should be regularly monitored, and policy-makers should be held accountable for their actions toward gender equality.

IN THE POST-GEF ERA, SHARING STORIES OF ACTION AND RESILIENCE IS RECOMMENDED

The breakout sessions highlighted stories that could be shared following the GEF.

BACK STORIES, FRONT STORIES

Participants recommended highlighting truthful stories that are easy to understand. Some participants specified that “back stories” (insisting on the influences from the past) as well as “front stories” (those which are unfolding in the present) should be shared equally, ensuring that a transformative component is added when stories are re-told. Similarly, the challenges faced by those who speak up must not be hidden.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STORIES

An impactful story encompasses both positive and negative elements, in order to acknowledge challenge while also gaining tools to overcome hardship. It is important to spotlight the “positive” elements of stories; for instance, stories of the commitment-makers, people who lobbied and facilitated changes, who broke glass ceilings, or women who made change possible for others. “Negative” stories should also not be disregarded as they can provide hope to others who are enduring similar hardships.

FROM THE MICROLEVEL TO THE GLOBAL LEVEL

Local stories, initiatives and action deserve to be amplified. Participants further mentioned the importance of looking at the “microlevel”, sharing microaggressions which women experience in their daily lives. It is also important to amplify global stories featuring several actors from different contexts and societal levels, so that grassroots organizations can get inspired by other initiatives.

“ONE GRAIN OF HOPE CAN MAKE A WHOLE TREE”

Sharing stories enhances connectivity, helping others to realize that their experience may not be unique, while disseminating stories is also a way to share messages that otherwise may have been silenced.

THE ROLE OF STATES, CSOs & THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN STORYTELLING AND TRIGGERING CHANGE

MEMBER STATES ARE PARAMOUNT BUT MUST CONSULT WITH PEOPLE

Participants recognized the critical role of Member States in the adoption of high-level feminist policies. Some outlined the need to provide economic aid to countries that prioritize the advancement of gender equality, though do not have the means to implement new policies and programs.

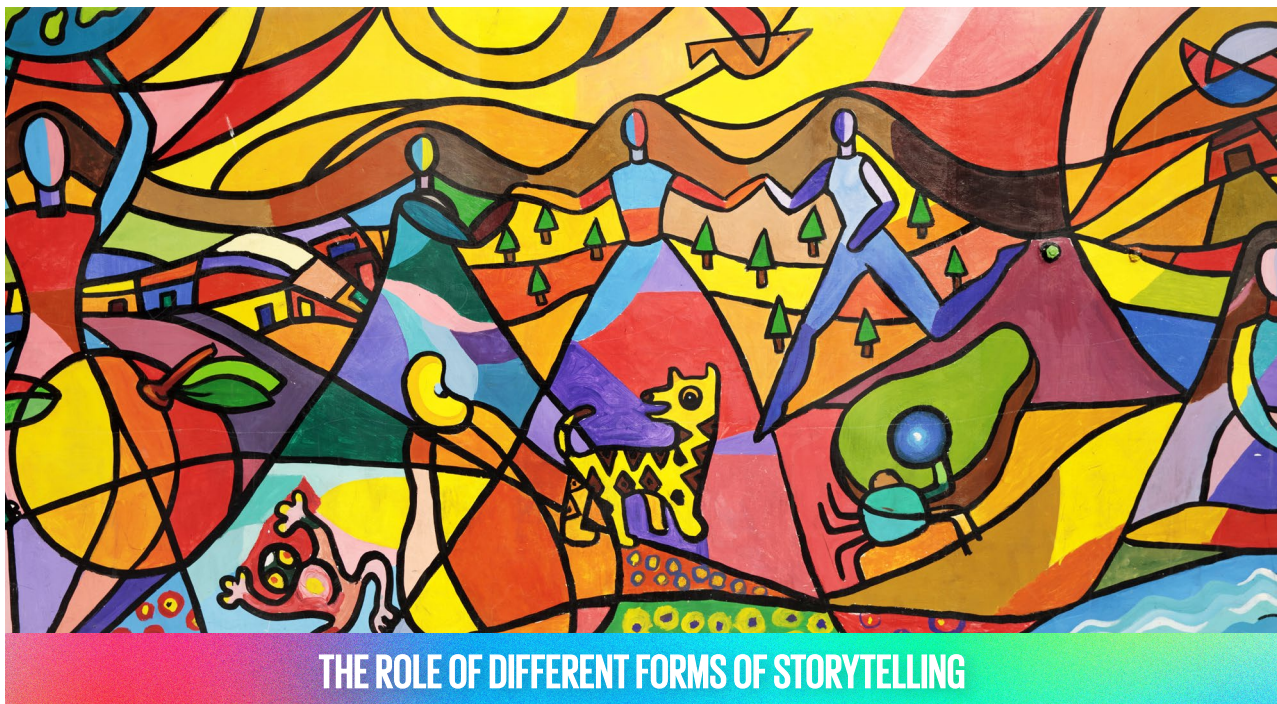
Participants asserted the importance of consulting the people who are primarily affected by a policy prior to its drafting. Youth organizations should be involved in political processes and inform decision-making. Storytelling can be useful in lobbying and advocacy efforts, showing a personal side to policymaking. It was also advised to pressure for change at Member State level through story dissemination across countries and the establishment of partnerships.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs): “BE THE CHANGE TO SEE THE CHANGE”

CSOs are a link between policymakers and the public, ensuring that local demands and needs are translated into policy solutions. CSOs can help decision makers take into account the local context and design customized solutions to ensure that specific needs are met.

Due to governmental influence on CSOs, solo or private initiatives can be better positioned in some countries to promote gender equality. To increasing their efficiency, CSOs should build synergies with each other; grassroots and gender organizations could join forces. Their role would also involve countering negative influences on the ground, for instance of some local religious leaders who sometimes justify abuses.

Through CSOs, greater attention and resources should be directed towards activism. In return, the activists should be encouraged to make, and be held accountable for, commitments toward gender equality. CSOs allow people to “be the change to see the change”.



EXPRESSING EMOTIONS AND CREATING EMPATHY

The participants highlighted that, through storytelling, people can step back and express emotions without getting personally involved. They can use metaphors to express personal experiences. On the listeners side, storytelling enhances the empathy with the tellers, which is described as a core feeling when it comes to survivors or victims.

A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES

Theater: plays and other theatrical performances provide opportunities to reflect on important social needs and rights. The theater forum approach was praised for its capacity to engage the emotions of the listeners: a story is told, to which the audience is invited to react; then the story is modified according to the reactions of the audience.

Poetry: poetry and blogging are useful vehicles for storytelling. Spoken word (a kind of poetry intended for performance) was deemed valuable to galvanize movements for change.

Alternative methods of storytelling: visual approaches, such as photos, tell stories that relate to a specific environment and use metaphors to address a situation.¹ Short videos were also recommended, as they give young people an opportunity to develop their own stories. Movies can also be produced with a view towards sharing a vision of society, while allowing detachment to transmit messages without any personal involvement (like theater plays).

Participants recognized that there may be technological issues associated with these storytelling techniques. Not all storytellers in the world have easy access to technology, and digital security is often not guaranteed.

Finally, the importance of archiving stories was emphasized. For accountability purposes, documenting these stories is a necessity.

¹ For example, a photo of a cut tree was brought as an example of a metaphor used by a victim of a child marriage.



HOW GLOBAL THINKING SHAPES LOCAL ACTION

RE-CONNECT GLOBAL AND LOCAL ACTORS

A disconnect between local and global levels was highlighted. Participants suggested that this is due to misrepresentations that should be fixed in order to ensure that policies are localized. Some participants believe in focusing on a top-down system, whereas others see people's voices as critical in lobbying to influence policymakers.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GLOBAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Local stories are used to define advocacy strategies; hence data is needed to back them up through innovative approaches. Snapshots of lived realities are also provided by the local level, while the global level uses them (and the related stories) to create action.

The global level provides lessons that are taken into consideration by local actors who use them to design customized actions. Global conversations, virtual meetings and social media are seen as opportunities to broaden one's horizons and widen the stories' reach. Local thinking can therefore be influenced by these stories.

Despite how inspiring global conversations can be, all participants warned of the disconnect between local and global levels, and the dangers in misunderstanding local processes in the absence of considering structural and culturally specific contexts.

A FACILITATOR OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL CHANGE

Storytelling facilitates local and global change. The ability to speak empowers the storytellers, since it allows them to reclaim their narrative with their own voice. Storytellers often find this practice healing, inspiring them to initiate change in their own lives.

Storytelling also builds empathy in different communities and brings opportunities to gain insights from history, preventing societies from repeating past mistakes. Finally, storytelling gathers the tellers and listeners, which is important from a cultural standpoint. Telling stories encourages people to come together and recognize their commonalities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM AND ACTION COALITIONS

The GEF should promote and provide spaces for meaningful and responsive storytelling

Stories make ideas more personal, relatable, and easier to digest, allowing listeners to feel empathy, which often fosters unity within communities. Storytelling also offers a space for reflection and enables more open discussion in local networks, while also at the global level. The GEF should promote and offer safe spaces for women and girls to share stories and speak about situations they would like to change. When done meaningfully and intentionally, such exchanges can inspire change and can encourage the implementation of good practices inspired by others.

The GEF should facilitate the sharing and full utilization of the wide set of available tools to share stories

A wide set of tools to share stories are already publicly available, including apps, flyers, theater, visual arts and many more. Through these tools, stories should be used as opportunities to reflect on the root causes of gender inequality. With the help of experts, strategies should be developed to build the capacities of storytellers and teach them how to tell stories to achieve a societal impact and raise awareness. The GEF can play a key role in raising awareness around the power of storytelling as an advocacy tool and connect actors that can share tactics and techniques.

The spirit of the GEF should live beyond the Forums in Mexico City and Paris

The GEF has the capacity to build larger and wider movements if it is sustained following the Forum in Paris. Citizens, organizations and policymakers could connect virtually to share and discuss stories, including good practices, tips and resources on how women can be empowered and integrated into economic, social, political and environmental policies; advocate for policy change; make stakeholders and decision-makers aware of the issues regarding women with disabilities; and publicize key messages and important statistics on social media.

The GEF should leverage education to ensure lasting change

Girls and young women require “human-friendly” education, which builds students’ awareness of their rights and personal values. Children could be taught storytelling at school, and educational platforms and apps could also be created following the GEF in order to keep participants active and motivated to make changes and uphold commitments in their own communities. These educational platforms could include spaces reserved for personal expression and networking. Workshops on GBV can integrate tools of storytelling and also focus on the dangers of toxic masculinity as well as the importance of body positivity. Teachers should not only be trained to focus on the academic success of the students, but also on their physical and emotional well-being.

The GEF should advocate for the development of gender data to adopt evidence-based approaches

Innovative approaches can be adopted if gender data is systematically produced. Progress cannot be achieved if statistical data – both quantitative and qualitative – is not made available. The impact of storytelling will be weakened if the stories are not backed up by data; therefore, evidence-based strategies should be developed on the basis of local stories of women.

The GEF should advocate for the adoption of gender-sensitive inclusive policies and should hold policymakers to account

Applying a gender lens - that takes into account specific barriers faced by women and girls - when developing inclusive policies is essential to ensure the full inclusion of women and girls with disabilities worldwide. Furthermore, in order for the GEF to trigger lasting change, policymakers should stay informed on the progress in global commitment making and program development. Since monitoring and accountability are the building blocks of effective policies, commitments through the Action Coalitions should be regularly monitored, and policymakers should be held accountable for their actions toward gender equality.



THANK YOU

We would like to offer our deepest thanks to all those who committed their time to make this Curated Discussion as rich and empowering as possible, and look forward to continuing the GEF journey together, in solidarity.

For more information, visit our website: forum.generationequality.org
For queries, contact: gen.equality.forum@unwomen.org

ANNEX

WHOLE STORIES SHARED BY THE SPEAKERS

MIA GARY

"In my school in Malaysia, our mathematics teacher gave us a lesson about sexual harassment. He explained us that the law protects us until we reach the age of 18, so as a joke, he started saying: 'You boys, if you want to rape, make sure the girl is over 18 years old'. I was so shocked! When I got back home, I posted a video on the social networks to tell what happened and it went viral.

Many people learned about the story and I got lots of supporters but was also met with a lot of hatred. I was even threatened of rape, to the point that my father had to file a police report and had me stay home to ensure that I was protected. The teacher was finally transferred to the State Education Department pending investigations. I created a movement called #MakeYourSchoolASaferPlace, so that teachers and students know that sexual harassment is unacceptable and should not be normalized. We should not be afraid to call out the perpetrators. A crime is a crime."

NORMA PALACIOS TRABAMALA

"My story is the story of a domestic worker who has been working for 27 years, but only recognized her own value 7 years ago. I attended training sessions in Mexico and that made me realize that I am a worthy and courageous woman. Then I met other women who like me experienced problems as domestic workers and together we decided to start a process of fighting for our rights through a trade union. I want to tell you my story today because I hope that other female domestic workers get inspired by it, see that it is possible to change any situation, no matter how difficult it may be, and get motivated to act collectively. I would like to tell them: 'Trade fear for courage, anger for tranquility, frustration for achievement. Be resilient.' This makes me feel motivated, empowered and committed."

GEREL DONDOVDORJ

"I was a 20-year-old university student when I lost my sight. One morning, I woke up and I realized that my eyes could not see anymore. I knew nothing about the lives of visually-impaired persons and it took 5 years from me to accept my blindness. I was the only blind person in my community but with the support of my family and friends, I continued my studies, graduated from my university and became a lawyer.

Sometimes I think that this world is made for sighted persons. We, as visually-impaired people, we face many challenges to participate in the society on an equal basis. Some of us are out of an occupation because of the lack of an accessible lighting, and less than 10% of all printed books in the world are accessible to visually-impaired persons.

Ten years ago, the first Mongolian blind girl who graduated from a US university told me: 'thanks to the inclusive policy there, I forgot my blindness.' At first, I did not understand what she meant but later on, I realized that if your environment is really free from barriers, then you are treated as a human rights holder. Now, as a blind woman, I have a dream: I want to see this world, including my country, Mongolia, inclusive for everyone, especially persons with disabilities."

SEVIDZEM ERNESTINE LEIKEKI

"I am from the north-west region of Cameroon. I was born and I work in the Kilum-Ijim forest area, and I am happy to share my story of how my organization fostered the integration of ecological and economic rights of women in climate and environmental issues.

I grew up seeing that women in my area are the most disadvantaged. They don't have opportunities, either social, economic or environmental. So growing up as a girl was challenging but I took my inspiration from my mother, who saw the education of the girls as very important. Women make up 51% of the 300,000 inhabitants of the forest area in my region. Therefore, sustainable environmental solutions must integrate women. For an entire generation, forest regeneration has been a male-dominated sector, so with my team of young people from CAMGEW Gender department, since 2010, we have been conducting awareness-raising, advocacy and capacity-building activities, to integrate women into the forests' value chain.

In my area, most women used to occupy themselves with domestic duties, but with the training sessions we provided, they understood that forests are a source of livelihood, so our forests became a source of hope. With their income, women can contribute to the development of their family and the community; they also take care of themselves, so GBV, especially domestic violence, has reduced."

JAHA DUKUREH

"I am originally from the Gambia. I am a survivor of female genital mutilation – FGM – and I was a child bride twice in my life. If someone was to ask me how I ended up being where I am, I would say it's true storytelling. When I was around 21-22 years old, I started blogging about what happened to me. And through that, I think the world became aware of my story.

But it was very difficult to get communities change their beliefs around practices that have been around for centuries. I set up an organization called Safe Hands for Girls, that aims at ending FGM, child marriage and all forms of GBV. We do work mostly in West Africa and in the US, and over the last 7 years, we have reached millions of people, impacted millions of lives, mostly through storytelling and training the media. One of our most effective tools is storytelling, because when I go into a community and I have a conversation with a father, I tell him: 'This is not something that the West is asking me to do, but it is something that I have been through myself.' I know what it feels like and I am speaking from that perspective of lived experience. This is something you cannot deny. You cannot deny the pain. You cannot deny the authenticity."

CEARLOVEY GRANALI

"I was only 15 years old when I started leading and implementing programmes for my community. First, a one-year nutrition programme, then capacity-building activities for our Girl Scout movement in The Philippines, plus a fund-raising campaign during the pandemic and finally, an online campaign with WAGGGS – the international Girl Guide movement – to eliminate GBV in the country.

There were moments where I asked myself: why am I doing all of this? Then I realized that it's not just because I am an empowered young person, but because I was a victim of Violence Against Women and Girls myself – VAWG. One day, I was riding home from school by public transportation when an old drunk man harassed me. It's really painful to be recalling it but what pains me more until this moment is that the people around me did nothing. They knew what was happening, but they did nothing about it. When the man got off, that was the only time where people there reacted, saying: 'Oh, he was drunk.' Until this day, I still wonder what could have been if someone stood out for me? And I tell this story not for sympathy nor comfort, but to send a message that VAWG is real. GBV is real. Inequality is real."

MALAK SWED

"I started acting with the civil society during the beginning of the Syrian uprising, in 2011. I organized several workshops and events for the refugees in Lebanon, whose number amounted to 2 millions at one point. We all know that at time of war, women are the most affected because they are the weakest link in a whole chain of power relationships. So they suffer more problems.

We engaged a project that intended to deal with women survivors of violence, including sexual violence, social discrimination or early marriage. We help those women refugees to tell their stories and voice their grievances, in a kind of interactive theater framework. Basically, we would have them stand in front of an audience and they would decide through an interaction with the audience, on what would be the better ending of that story. And there was a magical effect to this, a gradual change of mindset on the part of everybody because it was interactive and we were discussing some subconscious issues. We were trying to lower the resistance to change in a subconscious way. So I am very sensitive to the power of storytelling, drama, literature, fiction and their psychological transposition in social change. I will always remain a believer of this approach."

STEPHANIE ALTAMIRANO HERRERA

"I was sexually assaulted in a sport center when I was a child: a place where I went every day from the age of 8 until the age of 11. Actually, this was not a sport center, meaning a place where we went to play. It was a torture camp. One day, with a friend who was also aggressed in the same place, we realized that criminal proceedings were useless. We decided to launch a campaign and searched for the survivors of the same aggressor, who was actually the coach of this sport center. We found 10 women who were also the victims of this man. With the families we launched a campaign called 'Seremos las últimas' (We will be the last), contacted the media and got together for the Rights Protection Council to close the sports center.

When finally, the sticker 'Closed' was put on the door of the sport center, I was very impressed. I could not prevent asking myself if it was a reality. No other girl would be aggressed there. What we achieved is incredible and would not have been possible without this collective encounter and the support of the feminist organizations. Today, with 'Acompañantes en Red', a support network for women survivors of sexual harassment, we are fighting for a world free of this violence, to put an end to the silence, have our pain acknowledged and recover our history."

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