

Sylvia Heywood Report CSW62

Introduction

This was a dream come true. I was both honoured and excited about being part of the Soroptimist International South West Pacific (SISWP) delegation for CSW62 at the United Nations (UN) in New York, especially as a scholarship recipient.

As a feminist with a social conscious I am service driven to improve the lives of women and girls, locally, nationally and internationally through Soroptimism. It has been a goal of mine for several years to help improve membership to maintain our Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status.

ECOSOC is one of the six principal organs of the UN enabling SISWP as a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) to be a signatory to the UN. ECOSOC elected 45 Member States based on geographical areas to represent the 193 Member States of the UN which was formed after World War II in 1945 to: maintain peace throughout the world and develop friendly relations to help nations work together to improve poverty; end hunger, disease and illiteracy; and to encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms.

For more information on the UN www.un.org/en/aboutun and ECOSOC <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/> and <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/member-states>

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW) NY has been advancing the women's agenda for 46 years. Nearly 4,000 NGO representatives participate in the UN CSW each year. It is the largest annual gathering of the international women's movement at the UN. The NGO CSW/NY is responsible for convening NGO's during the UN Commission meetings and at other UN gatherings.

As democratic forms of governance become more widespread, greater public attention and scrutiny are paid to how states exercises their authority and does or does not interact with its citizens. As part of civil society NGO's are able to advocate at the UN on behalf of society to address the critical gender equality issues in their state.

The Bureau of the Commission plays a crucial role in facilitating the preparation, and in ensuring the successful outcome of the annual sessions of the Commission, Bureau members are elected for two years and the new Chair of the Bureau for the 62nd session (2018) of the Commission on the Status of Women is H.E. Ms. Geraldine Byrne Nason from Ireland.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 17 goals (SDG's) and it is particularly relevant to know that these form part of key international agreements. As we should all know by now Goal 5 to Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls is relevant to all of the 17 SDG goals.

The General Assembly adopted the SDG's at the end of the Millennium Development Goals setting new targets for what was the next 15 years. In 2018 we now have 12 years to reach these goals.

Overview of the UN

The General Assembly is the main deliberative decision-making organ in the UN and comprises all Member States. I was very excited to be in the General Assembly Hall to hear some of the many Ministers give statements about what their country is doing to meet the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, or what they had identified needs doing in order to meet them. Some of the countries included: the Dominica Republic, South Africa, Costa Rica, Norway, Austria, Zambia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Israel, Turkey, Nigeria, Spain, Finland, Albania and Lithuania.

The Commission was established by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1946 to prepare recommendations on promoting women's rights in: political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. The Commission contributes to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

UN Women is the UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and serves as the Secretariat of the Commission and supports all aspects of the Commission's work.

The primary theme of CSW62 was '**Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls.**' There was also a review of the '**Participation in and Access of Women to the Media, and Information and Communications Technologies and their Impact on and use as an Instrument for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women.**'

Before I left New Zealand I had been well prepared with information about the planned presentations and discussions which were delivered through two types of events that occur at the same time during CSW62, called Side and Parallel events. The schedule of Side events were organised by Member States and UN entities and took place in the UN. The Parallel events took place outside the UN in one of four locations and provided best practice to help attendees gain perspectives on the problems of rural women everywhere and how to advance the women's agenda.

Consultation Day

I decided to attend the Consultation Day which was an optional event. I'm so pleased I did as it was very informative and set the scene for the next two weeks of the Commission. It was here that the challenges for rural women and girls were brought to the forefront and the first time I heard about the plight of widows both young and old. I also heard, first hand from women and girls who lived in developing countries with little or no rights to: land, inheritance, or protection, making them the most left behind women and girls.

The presentations and panel discussions concentrated on the themes of rural women and girls and their: lack of education, resources, water and sanitation, gender equality, transportation, land ownership, migrant isolation and trafficking.

Key points from the Consultation Day for me were:

- The need for direct engagement with women who do not have platforms of engagement to make their issues visible as people in power can voice their concerns.
- The realization that civil society is accountable and able to talk to diplomats.
- The need to train women in advocacy to help promote best practice and empowerment.

Parallel and Side Events – Advancing Towards Leaving No One Behind

1. “Solutions to the Multilayered issues Faced by Rural Women”

The first Parallel event I attended was sponsored by our very own Soroptimist International where I heard of the work in all our four federations. It was very uplifting to hear of our collective work with vulnerable rural women and girls around the world.

Challenges:

- Continuing the rhetoric that a woman’s place is in the home leads to an appalling lack of female representation in Parliaments across the South Pacific.
- The effects of gender inequality
- Lack of economic opportunities
- Under representation in decision making
- Lack of health care and education

Opportunities:

- Work with local Government and Central Government Agencies to focus policies to support rural women and ensuring that technology and rural women’s access to ICT facilities is enabling rather than inaccessible to remote regions.

2. “Rights, Voice, Dreams and Friendship: How Teenage Girls Achieve Empowerment”

This next Parallel event was sponsored by The Young Women’s Development Groups about a project in the Czech Republic and the Republic of Russia with the aim to empower women and young girls in their society to help them be listened to and be respected in their community. This project started in 2012 and was only possible due to the effort of the women who administer the project.

I was surprised and taken aback when I heard about the intolerable attitude of the both the Czech Republic and the Republic of Russia Governments lack of law enforcement structures. I was shocked that these so called European countries deprive girls of an equal education to that

of boys. Women and girls do not even have control over their health as they do not have the decision making power. It appears the more traditional the community the more often it will mean less rights and protection for women and girls in that community.

I was very impressed with the simple steps and talented women who were part of the project enabling young girls and women to feel valued in an environment that does not allow women a voice.

3. “Case Studies of Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in New Zealand, Australia and Argentina”

Dr. Jackie Blue, Human Rights Commissioner for Women’s Rights and the Equal Employment Opportunities in New Zealand moderated this panel. The Panelists included: Julie Anne Genter, Minister for Women (New Zealand), Jo Finer, General Manager of Industry & Business Affairs, Fonterra New Zealand), Kate Jenkins, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, Renee Graham (Chief Executive, Ministry for Women New Zealand), Adela Nores, Board member of the “Sociedad Rural Argentina” and Agricultural producer, and Fiona Gower, President Rural Women New Zealand,

The panel discussed the makeup of the urban to rural area and the importance of agriculture and horticulture to the New Zealand economy as a primary industry. Women’s contribution to rural society and the economy has been vastly underestimated worldwide. The traditional image in New Zealand of farmers is white and male. Female roles go unrecognised.

Australia reported that they had started a conversations with rural areas and recognised intersectional disadvantages. They were now looking at key priority areas going forward to improve grants.

Argentina reported similar issues to New Zealand, but rural women have less options to escape and stay safe. There is a reluctance to not want to make a complaint. Economic security is a greater risk as only sons’ inherit the farms and women are expected to work on the farm for free.

Fonterra Co-operative Group New Zealand provided information about Fonterra Dairy Women’s Network which began with a few women around a kitchen table and now it has 10,000 members across nationally. Women have gone from collecting milk in buckets to planning strategically. Partnership Fonterra & Dairy Women Award recently appointed the first woman national president for Federated Farmers in 118 years.

The Dairy Women’s Network connects women through support channels, events and initiatives. It is a success because it helps women with skills and confidence propelling them into a journey of self-discovery.

Challenges:

- Need to get more rural women into leadership positions and see more rural women in sciences.
- The lack of affordable internet connection for education and business (isolation) is not good for wellbeing it is essential that rural women are connected at least to a landline.
- The cost of child care and consequential limitations
- Shortage of housing
- Climate change and pollution
- Self-belief and confidence
- Access to finance and financial literacy

Opportunities:

- To achieve gender equality for rural women by economic empowerment and women's entrepreneurship examples: making and selling quality wool blankets; promoting walks, showcasing the region to visitors, and an Accountancy business now employing other young mothers.
- We all work together including companies

These first two events really summed up for me that civil society and Governments need to work together in order to meet the 2030 Agenda targets that they won't be reached without this commitment.

4. "Mobilizing Public and Private Investments in the LDCs for Women's Economic Empowerment".

The discussion showcased the joint initiative of the 'Inclusive and Equitable Local Development' (IELD), which seeks to promote women's economic empowerment at the local level by identifying, de-risking and matching gender-responsive investments with public and private domestic capital. The programme engages with local governments in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to identify and fund gender responsive local investments that directly promotes women's economic well-being.

Challenges:

- There has been long term chronic under investment in women's gender equality.
- Need a gender focus to be in front (gender lens) to really connect and identify challenges.
- Influence the women's agenda and climate change to attract blended finance.

Opportunities:

- Advocate that successful economies include full participation of women.
- Ensure women's place is in every level of society and is respected especially in which women lead companies and serve on boards.

- Promote women's work in agriculture identifying the many studies showing that where women are given land rights and seeds everyone benefits.
- Work with local governments and define where and who the local stakeholders are.
- Promote investment in women's SME's is essential for gender equality but also necessary for lifting the poverty statistics.

For me the key to the success of programmes like these begins with Governments identifying the value of reaching the SDGs. I particularly liked hearing that the Bangladesh Government have set minimum targets for central banks to fund SMEs and Switzerland's strong political reasons being embodied in their foreign policy. Nonetheless, I believe one of the biggest concerns for the 2030 agenda is one of finance!

5. 'Youth, Gender and Identity'

The concept note advised that the session will consider the complexity of identity, sexuality, age and social media and how social norms influence our behaviours and expectations as well as possibilities in our lives and it did live up to expectation.

Both the UK and Danish Governments have taken actions to empower their young people and promote equality using evidence from surveys they have carried out. I came away from this session feeling that there are very positive structures and policies that can be put in place to protect our children develop into socially responsible adults.

Challenges:

- Social media is both a challenge and opportunity for young people.
- Social media reinforces stereotypes and creates double standards as to how people of different genders should behave.
- Girls suffer in terms of sexuality because more likely to have anxiety and tend to be dissatisfied with their bodies.
- The media frequently portrays women in a particular way – usually defined by narrow roles and firmly placed in the domestic sphere, talking about cleaning and housework and of course the female sex object.
- In the UK 11 -16 year old girls spend a minimum of 4.5 hours on line a day.
- Facebook and Instagram designed to make us post on them. Research shows that when young people get likes they are 50% more confident and 19% feel they are more likeable.
- How to educate young people that pornography is not about respectful relationships.

Opportunities:

- Find the evidence – survey perceptions of gender, sexuality and body image
- Promote to young people what is a normal loving relationship
- Governments take steps to secure young people on line by providing and enforcing legislation. E.g. provide funding to address LGTB bullying.

- Give Police powers to arrest young people for sharing nude photos online
- Funding for STEM type subjects to help change gender norms
- Work with large organisations (advertising) to redefine what it means to be masculine or feminine.
- Parents need to lead the talk about social media to empower their daughters and sons.

I came away from this session feeling that there are very positive structures and policies that can be put in place to protect our children develop into socially responsible adults. I agreed with the main message that we all have a responsibility to ensure that our societies offer online and offline spaces for young people to express themselves and share their experiences without fear of being harassed, stigmatized or disadvantaged. More information at <https://siswp.org/news/135-youth-gender-and-identity-exploring-how-gender-affects-our-experience-of-the-modern-world.html>

6. “Women in leadership: lessons from Australian companies leading the way”.

I was very excited to hear about the ground breaking new research for boosting women’s representation in leadership which was developed by the Australian Government’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency and Peak Business Group.

The Chair was the Hon. Kelly O’Dwyer MP, Minister for Women, Australia. The speakers were: Libby Lyons, Director, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Christy Forrest, Principal Adviser, Business Council of Australia and Alex Archila, President, Shale and Global Diversity and Inclusion Committee, BHP.

It was clear from this event that quotas and targets both work and that targets drive cultural change. It was reported that Australia needs real cultural change and people need to be responsible for meeting targets and only then will they see real cultural change. Targets such as the Australian Government to have 40% women into parliament.

The discussion focused on practical evidence based strategies to overcome barriers to women’s participation in leadership and in traditionally male dominated roles. The Business Council of Australia, McKinsey & Company and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) teamed up to undertake this important study. Using three years of WGEA data and more than 40 interviews. All attendees were given a copy of their report which could be used as a framework for use with other organisations and even in other countries.

The WGEA stressed that under the heading of leadership accountability and the gender pay gap it is clear that reducing the pay gap issues are three times more effective by reporting it to the organisations executive and more importantly the board. Gender pay gaps do not close on their own. The gaps must be identified and will need resources just like a serious business issue. Policy and strategies by themselves don’t make change.

Challenges:

- Deep rooted unjust beliefs about gender still remain in parts of society today and continue to hold women back. Australian Government believes that the only way we will change those beliefs is for women to take leadership.
- Systemic barriers also hold women back such as the lack of child care and flexible work environments.
- Remove unconscious bias in recruitment policies
- Lack of affordable child care
- Change must be an important outcome for the business

Opportunities:

- The best tools we have today is the collection of data and research which tells us that companies with women board members outperform other boards without women in a five year period.
- Governments set targets to focus on getting more women into work and reduce the gender pay gap.
- Information very compelling for health and safety reasons to change traditionally male work environments to become gender equal.
- What gets measured gets done - need to push the measurement of women in the workplace.
- Embed flexible working arrangements
- Enable organisations supply chain partners to set their own targets
- Companies have to remove the barriers and make sure the infrastructure is there and be vigilant where the barriers are and exist e.g. removing a manager's technology when she goes on maternity leave.
- Give women experiences through sponsorship and mentoring

I really enjoyed this session, it gave me hope that real change can happen, we just have to be more proactive, use data, research and provide the return to make business and organisations believe culture change will provide benefits. We now we have the tools to go out and do just that.

7. **“Leave No Rural Women Behind”** was CSW62 Flag Ship event sponsored by UN Women and Partners.

This half day event provided a dialogue with activists from rural areas from around the world to discuss what it would take to leave no woman or girl in any rural area behind in the achievement of the SDGs.

Lopa Banerjee, Director of UN Women's Civil Society Division told us that rural women and girls face some of the most daunting challenges of our time and when governments adopted the Sustainable Development Agenda and make pledges to achieve the Agenda that no one will be left behind.

Throughout the day activists and participants shared their experience on what leaving no one behind meant for them. Representation was visible from different parts of the world including: indigenous women, women with disabilities, members of the LGBTI community and widows.

We were informed that the responses from this event will form the basis of the draft set of standards and benchmarks. We heard from many women including those who were not able to attend due to Visa issues, but were able to either speak on skype or by video.

I felt very privileged to be part of this UN Leave No One Behind event as part of Soroptimist International South West Pacific delegation to recommend a set of standards and benchmarks on how the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2030 will ensure that no one is left behind.

We were all seated at circular tables where we were able to discuss and write down statements that we felt would make a difference. The main questions we were asked were:

1. Do you feel you are left behind or do you know people who are left behind?
2. Provide benchmarks or standards in order for change to happen?

The panel reported back on the findings which included: colonisation and patriarchy as the underlying issues; being marginalised and living in social isolation; rural children are not aware of their full potential; root causes of discrimination not being addressed; loss of inheritance, not equal before the law; access to education; Justice implementation and access to food and water.

Challenges:

- End the stigmatization and exploitation of widows
- Women in Africa, endure daily, harmful cultural practices in abject poverty
 - cultural cleansing
 - disinheritance
 - sexually exploitation
- Land rights for women and girls
- The importance of implementing policy and legislation within rural communities.
- How rural women and girls can tell their our own stories
- Women and girls, are often excluded from discussions that shape their own development and that of their communities, countries and the world they live in.

Opportunities:

- Greater representation of women in local and national governments
- Universal application of existing legislation for protecting women and girls' rights
- Investment in rural youth
- Provide a platform to hear the voices of the most marginalized women and girls

8. **“Case Studies for Economic Empowerment of Rural Women from New Zealand”** sponsored by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission.

After yesterday’s session on **‘Leave no rural woman behind’** listening to women’s first-hand experiences which were blamed globally on traditional patriarchal and cultural effects on women’s human rights. I was hoping that this empowerment event would lift my heavy heart.

Helen Swales, National President of the Business & Professional Women (BPW) chaired the session. She reminded us that New Zealand was the first country in the world where women won the right to vote nearly 125 years ago. And that there were still challenges ahead and opportunities to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls and make available access for women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.

There were five speakers, the first was Fiona Gower the National President of Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ). Fiona is also a graduate of the Agri-Women’s Development Trust Escalator programme and has served on the National Council since 2013.

Fiona reiterated that farming and agriculture is New Zealand’s primary industry and as such is seen as the backbone of our economy and our rural women are the backbone that holds the community together. However, she advised that this is not always recognised by our peers or counterparts. Fiona spoke about transferrable skills that women learn which are often not given recognition and needs to be understood.

Ashleigh Smith an amazing young woman won the Queen’s Young Leader Award in 2017 for her New Zealand anti-bullying campaign after three schoolmates committed suicide because of bullying. Her positivity resulted in creating an online programme called ‘Sticks n Stones’.

Janet Gibb from Business and Professional Women provided information about a youth strategy developed by the Waikato District Council and the work of the young people in the area.

Another young woman Lauren Harrigan talked about the use of media to promote positive images of women and girls and thought provoking advertorials such as this video which has some simple messages about legislation that has been enforced more successfully than the Equal Pay Act 1972 produced by Double Denim <http://www.treatherright.co.nz/>

The last speaker was Ruth Shanks who is a recognised member of the Country Women’s Association of New South Wales (CWA) reported that CWA has been around for 90 years explained that they do not attract any corporate or Government money. Most of the money they raise is from older women and that all projects are monitored including their impacts.

Ruth presented data collected which showed CWA had funded 17 projects in 2017 throughout 11 countries, benefitting 91,187 women and 15,295 children all linked to one or more

Sustainable Development Goal's (SDGs). Ruth reported that some recipients had taken up training and were introduced to practical workshops which put them into good position when applying for internships.

Ruth said the aim of the project is to empower recipients to become agents of change in their community. Project activities took place after school or college. She gave an example of a woman from Papua New Guinea who went to Fiji for eight months and when she went back to Papua New Guinea the woman vowed she would do something in her community as the result of her experience and then started a Country Women of the World group. The woman then recognised there was no training for young girls so she opened a school. She came up with an idea for a Business Women's Club and got funding for women so they could do what they wanted to do.

Lastly, Ruth informed us about a survey which the CWA and the World Association of Industrial and Technological Research Organisations launched the night before called the International Forum on Rural Women which aims to gather a global perspective on the living conditions of rural women. Here is the link www.ifrw.org.uk

Challenges:

- Isolation is the main problem
- Lack of access to internet means that rural women do not have access to business or for social networking etc.
- Getting mainstream media to print our stories and it is even harder for rural women. Social media therefore becomes another media tool for them to deal with.
- On line bullying
- Rural children can only access internet when they reach high school
- Seven year lag on the installation of the internet in rural areas, in an age when women are transitioning into digital business and staying in their own businesses is not acceptable.

Opportunities:

- Women often go into rural areas with a high standard of education and therefore very able to take on leadership roles in both governance and management.
- Local Councils are able to implement a youth strategy to enable the youth to speak openly about what the Council can do better.
- The use of media advertising can give economic power to rural communities and the movement of rural women such as equal pay.
- NGO's and entrepreneurs funding of grass roots projects where project recipients come to them with their ideas to reach the SDGs.
- Promote ant-bullying programmes such as 'Sticks n Stones' which may attract Government funding.

I know I keep saying this but I really enjoyed this session especially as it was about my home country New Zealand. It reminded me that there is a lot of empowering programmes going on

not just in New Zealand but around the world which are often absent from more traditional forms of media. More information at <https://siswp.org/news/133-case-studies-for-economic-empowerment-of-rural-women-from-new-zealand.html>

Conclusion

It is clear to see from attending these sessions that there are many, many challenges facing rural women and girls globally. It is vitally important that Governments recognise the investment needed to improve everyone's human rights by improving women's and girl's rights, by setting their own targets and reaching the SDGs.

It is also obvious to me that there are many opportunities for women who have a voice to speak on behalf of others. As Soroptimists we do this through supporting local, national, federation and international projects to educate, enable and empower women and girls who don't have a voice. I'm more determined than ever to encourage more women into Soroptimism to improve the lives of women and girls globally.

The whole experience of attending CSW62 was both overwhelming at times and absolutely empowering. I am so grateful for being given the opportunity to attend and report back to my fellow Soroptimist sisters.