

Summary paper: All Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security panel discussion on adolescent girls

On the week of World Refugee Day 2019, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Women, Peace and Security partnered with Plan International UK, ActionAid UK, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) to host a panel discussion on meeting the needs of adolescent girls in emergencies.

Chaired by: Baroness Hodgson of Abinger, Co-Chair of the APPG on Women Peace and Security

Speakers: Hussaini Abdu – Country Director, Plan International Nigeria

Daphne Jayasinghe – Acting Head of Policy, IRC

Farah Nazeer – Deputy Director of Advocacy, Action Aid UK

Baroness Hodgson's introduction

- Adolescent girls face specific needs and vulnerability based on the intersection of their age and gender, interventions which fail to reflect their specific needs can have negative repercussions for the rest of their lives.
- Girls not being in school can lead to early marriages, early pregnancy which result in health complications exacerbating existing inequalities and intergenerational poverty.
- Currently more people are displaced people around the world than ever before, approximately 60 million. In times of crisis domestic violence soars and the rights of women are rolled back.
- For this reason, the women, peace and security agenda must respond to the current context of increasingly protracted crises and widespread displacement.

Hussaini Abdu - Country Director, Plan International Nigeria:

- The context and major drivers of the conflict is rooted in a lack of access to formal education, particularly for girls.
- Education is often seen as just a 'development issue' and therefore is often not valued or prioritised during humanitarian responses. But this perception is no longer relevant to the global context which is seeing more and more protracted crises.
- 80% of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are not in camps but are living in host communities. The international community needs to change how we work in protracted crises to facilitate and incentivise education for girls within communities long-term.
- DFID is a major partner of Plan International Nigeria. DFID does value education and Plan International are working to ensure the UK will continue to be a driving positive force and invest more resources into responses specific to issues faced by adolescent girls.

Daphne Jayasinghe - Acting Head of Policy, IRC:

- Currently, adolescent girls are caught between the gaps between child and adult services.
- As IRC's research from South Sudan showed, conflict is a major driver of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as crisis often reinforce harmful gender norms. This research also child, early and forced marriage remains common in South Sudan

- The policy environment is showing a willingness to act more on gender-based violence (GBV) but there are not enough policies that address adolescent girls specifically. There needs to be a dedicated government strategy for GBV on adolescent girls.
- There are huge shortfalls in GBV funding. To make an impact the UK Government needs to provide more long-term flexible funding.
- When designing programmes there is a need to consider that adolescent girls are not reporting violence and do not know where to report if they tried. This can be tackled by involving girls in the design and implementation of programmes and interventions.

Farah Nazeer - Deputy Director of Advocacy, Action Aid UK:

- Adolescence should be a time for exploration and growth for girls, a time when they expand their educational horizons and relations outside of the family. Yet while this is true for boys we see that for girls this is a time where their world begins to contract.
- When there are power imbalances families and girls feel they cannot push back against harmful social norms in their communities leading to increased CEFM (child, early and forced marriage) and FGM.
- Central to ActionAid's approach to humanitarian programming is shifting power to local leadership and building women's leadership.
- It is important that more research into the impact of power imbalances takes place.

Q and A

To what extent do you think the SDGs are a relevant framework for the rights and needs of adolescent girls?

Summary of panel's answers:

- The SDGs provide a framework for solutions that are imbedded in national strategies and allow for ownership of development locally and nationally.
- They are useful highlighting the importance of gender equality and the needs of people rather than geographical location.
- They are helpful in mobilising donors to put pressure on governments yet there is a limit to how you can use the SDGs for national advocacy.
- There is a problem with who is being counted and who is being left behind as refugee and displaced people are not being counted. The international community needs to look into how SDGs can be localised, so we can ensure all groups, including adolescent girls, are being reached.
- There is risk that countries are only looking at the SDG indicators, so they have a good review and are ignoring a holistic view.

What is the value of a more feminist approach and which programme and local policy changes have girls led on?

Summary of panel's answers:

- Power inequalities/hierarchies are fundamental to women and girls' experiences. Patriarchy is the structural issue that we need to approach it from its root, so we can achieve gender equality, yet it is often difficult to get funding for advocacy and influencing.

- The short sightedness of short-term approaches won't be able to have the impact of deconstructing these power structures over time.
- Fundamental to the success of connecting the local to the global is building movements and talking to women's groups.
- As an international organisation you need to face patriarchy and power structures in your own practice and decision making.

Issues of power structures are central - 3 years ago at the world humanitarian summit there was a big push to get education with humanitarian response. How do we reignite that campaign? How do we ensure we are provided for IDPs?

Summary of panel's answers:

- We need to articulate the urgency of the need for IDPs and raise awareness of the gaps in funding and services.
- Currently, momentum for IDPs goes up and down because we still have a short-term approach to humanitarian response. Many conflicts are intractable, yet funding is moved to the hot spots and taken away too soon. We need to change the way we respond to emergencies. Programmes need to be longer than 1-2 years.
- The way to solve systemic problem in humanitarian contexts is through development.
- We should not be differentiating between refugees and IDPs.

Does the bad example in the UK on underage marriage impact international campaigns?

Summary of panel's answers:

- There is an attitude in many countries that campaigns such a campaign against child early and forced marriage (CEFM) are being pushed by foreign ways of life even though we can see that early marriage deepens the circle of poverty and need to push this evidence. But other counties, particularly Commonwealth countries, do take note of the UK's example on issues like CEFM.

How do we change norms?

Summary of panel's answers:

- Conflict and crises can disrupt social norms both the challenge as well as reinforce them. We can develop these attitudes through discussion groups.
- Community engagement is vital, and we have seen successes e.g. FGM. The issue is that this work requires consistency and many years.