



## **UN Report CSW 62**

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The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the largest annual gathering of the United Nations calendar and this year it took place from 12 – 23 March 2018. It is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As a member of CSW, Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa New Zealand (PWANZ) has a responsibility to be represented at these annual sessions to evaluate progress, set standards and formulate policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women worldwide.

As well as Government representatives, there were more than 4,300 civil society representatives from 130 countries participated in this year's CSW and PWANZ delegates were among five of those women.

This year's CSW's main theme was the "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls".

I have to admit that having always lived in an urban setting I found that it was somewhat new to me to especially concentrate on the many real difficulties encountered by rural women over and above those experienced by their urban sisters.

### **Rural women: the invisible mainstay of sustainability**

What I learnt is that rural women are often the invisible mainstay of sustainability – as it is most often rural women who ensure the food security for communities, build climate resilience and strengthen economies.

Yet despite the importance of this role, gender inequalities, such as discriminatory laws and social norms, combined with a fast-changing economic, technological and environmental landscape very often restrict

their full potential, leaving them far behind men and their urban counterparts.

I have to admit that I did not immediately appreciate the link between climate change and the potential for rural women to be disadvantaged, but what I learnt is that with a changing climate, women who already have unequal access to land, water and energy are further negatively impacted. For instance, as floods and droughts increase, rural women and girls spend more time and effort to collect and secure water and fuel, missing out on education and income-generating opportunities.

It is good to know that UN Women supports efforts to increase women farmers' access to land, financing, climate information and climate-smart technologies to achieve gender equality through climate-resilient agriculture, as well as enhancing their capacity to move up green agricultural value chains.

### **2018 PWANZ delegation**

The women in the 2018 PWANZ delegation (myself and four other self funded delegates) were thrilled to be able to immerse ourselves in panel presentations and discussions on topics that were many and varied.

The following is feedback from this years' PWANZ delegates:

#### **Joanna Maskell's feedback;**

CSW62 was an amazing opportunity to hear what other governments/NGO's and National Human Rights Organisations are doing to advance the rights of women in girls in rural areas and gender equality more generally.

Listening to other delegates describe the conditions of their home countries that included war and kidnappings was very sobering. My reflection is that despite the challenges we face in New Zealand around the isolation of rural women and girls, poverty, violence and inequality particularly for Maori and Pasifika women we have the resources to fix these issues. We are in a very privileged position as a developed country and we have a responsibility to act with urgency to implement gender equality for girls and women of all ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds.

As a result of attending CSW62 I am convinced that NZ must have a plan to implement the Sustainable Development Goal's with targets and auditing including Goal 5, Gender equality. It was great to hear that other New Zealand NGO's attending at CSW intend to put pressure on the New

Zealand government to do this, and the Human Rights Commission will join them in this advocacy work through the International Women's Caucus.

I am also convinced that more needs to be done in New Zealand to achieve equality for women in leadership and decision-making. These are areas of work I am hopeful that the Human Rights Commission will pick up later this year.

### **Deborah Tangney's feedback:**

To have been part of the Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa NZ delegation to CSW was an amazing experience.

Politics plays a large part of the CSW - this was something that I had not previously considered but found really interesting. As a previously fairly non-political woman, attending such an important global event, I was surprising to be exposed to the many behind-the-scenes NGOs. What I feel now is key, is for the world to now move forward with information sharing and the necessary changes in attitudes and government policies.

On a personal level I will share what I have heard and learnt, and challenge ways of thinking – both my own and of people I interact with.

For PWANZ to send a delegation is to be encouraged as it exposes women from all walks of life to the lives of other woman. The Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa, should be congratulated for enabling ordinary caring NZ women to attend such an event.

### **Ashleigh Smith's feedback:**

There were many things I expected to feel at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Excited, nervous, amazed, inspired and maybe even a little overwhelmed. It's hard not to feel overwhelmed, it's the United Nations. The first thing I did when I arrived at UNHQ was find the New Zealand flag. It took a few minutes and a slight mishap with the Australian flag didn't help. But when I finally found our flag, I felt proud. Proud to from such a beautiful country and proud to be representing it.

Over the course of my two weeks at the United Nations this sense of pride was over thrown by something much stronger. I didn't expect to leave the UN everyday feeling sick to my stomach. I didn't expect to leave with the weight of a ball and chain firmly grasped to my heart. But that's exactly how I felt. Each day I could feel myself dropping deeper and deeper into a hole of hopelessness. Every new reality I learned was another shovel of dirt

from beneath my feet. However, almost every day there were also rays of light. I would hear the stories of woman that had fought through the most unimaginable hardships, now representing their NGO's and countries. Their stories often gave me the inspiration I needed to get through each day. However, by the end of CSW the hopelessness hole was very deep. Why? Let me try and explain:

- 2/3's of the worlds illiterate persons are women
- Women represent 70% of people living me the poverty line
- Woman have significantly higher rates of domestic violence. Global estimates of WHO indicate 35% of woman worldwide experience either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.
- Only 10% of countries have a female head of state
- Millions of baby girls have been killed around the world because they are less desirable to male babies (gendercide).
- The disparities of indigenous woman became clearer and clearer every day.
- On average woman earn 23% less than men.
- 51% of work done by women is unpaid
- On average 90% of women's income is invested back into her household, whereas men on average only reinvest 30-40%.
- An estimated 225 million women globally are not using safe and effective family planning methods. This can most significantly be linked to lack in education.
- AT LEAST 500 million girls and woman globally lack adequate facilities for managing their menstruation.

Two points that really struck me:

- Over 200 million women and girls around the globe have suffered from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Most commonly occurring between the ages of 5-7 years, young girls are taken and forced to have their vaginas mutilated. No anaesthetic, no consent, no pain relief, no sterile equipment. What's the benefits? Zero. What's negative side effects? There are too many to list. Most significantly the implications to the urinary and sexually reproductive systems, let alone the psychological impacts.
- On one of the first days of CSW I heard a story of a Woman from Africa. At the age of 11 she was kidnapped from her village, by a group of men and taken to the mountains, where one man raped her. Can I repeat, only 11 years-old?! Now that she had lost her virginity she would not be fit to marry anyone else. Her father forced her to

marry the man that raped her. This is not an isolated incident. This is happening to children every day.

There is so much more I could add, but I think the above should have provided enough context.

The theme for this year's United Nations Commission on Women was based around women living in rural areas. Summing up why the theme is important is pretty easy. Rural women are over-represented in almost every statistic I've mentioned above. If not all of them.

I grew up in a rural community and had an awesome childhood. However, during my time growing up in the Maniototo I noticed a number of challenges women and children living rurally face. For example

- Higher level of difficulty in accessing specialist healthcare
- Lack of reproductive and sexual health care/ clinics
- Social Isolation
- Higher level of difficulty in accessing mental health care.

As time went on, these issues I identified as being important just felt more and more trivial. I felt incredibly privileged to have grown up in New Zealand, but often to the point I would feel guilty about being privileged. This was something I really battled with and have battled with in the past. Thankfully I have found some light on this topic.

I had the childhood that every child has the right to. I had food on the table. I had parents that loved and supported me in everything I've ever dreamed of doing. I had an education. I had access to health care. I didn't carry any worries beyond what tree I was going to climb after school. So yes, I am incredibly privileged, but it's what I do with it that counts.

I'm not sure why we have all been put on this planet and given an opportunity at life. But there is one thing I am certain about- because we are here, surely our life mission should be to fight our hardest to leave this place better than what we found it. Privilege is only a bad thing when it is misused.

Now that I had established that conclusion I was still left in this deep hole of hopelessness. The problems the world is facing just seem so incredibly huge that anything I tried to do about them would be pointless.

It was during a session run by nurses that I found clarity! (Good old nurses right)!! This quote seemed to pull together all the ideas running around in my head. It was written by His Holiness Dalai Lama in "ONE HUMAN FAMILY"

"I believe that to meet the challenges of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for his or her own self, family or nation, but for the benefit for all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of

natural resources, and through concern for future generations, the proper care of the environment.

Today's world requires that we accept the oneness of humanity. In the past isolated communities could afford to think of each other as fundamentally separate and even existed in total isolation. Nowadays, however, events in one part of the world eventually affect the entire planet. Therefore, we have to treat each major local problem as global concern from the moment it begins. We can no longer invoke the national racial or ideological barriers that separate us without destructive repercussion. In the context of our new interdependence, considering the interests of others is clearly the best form of self-interests".

### **Penny Mudford's feedback:**

Initially I was to attend CSW62 as part of the PWANZ delegation. Subsequently I was appointed by the New Zealand Government as civil society representative on the New Zealand Government delegation. My role was primarily as advisor to the delegation to provide expert knowledge of the priority theme, challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. I participated on the Government delegation in the Ministerial segment during the attendance by Hon Julie Anne Genter, Minister for Women, and at the negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions. I also provided daily briefings on the Government delegation's activities to the New Zealand NGO groups who were attending CSW.

This was my first time attending CSW and what I saw was a huge collaboration of people and nations working to improve the lives of women and girls throughout the world. The experience was a strong reminder of the disparity that exists in our world between the lives of women and girls in some parts compared with others. There was a wide range of issues, from the basics of life, such as sanitation and clean water, to the right to education and the means of earning a living.

The priority theme relating to rural women and girls highlighted challenges and difficulties faced by many women and girls who live in rural areas in undeveloped countries where they are the carriers of household water and the growers and gatherers of food for their families. The hardships these women and girls experience on a daily basis are deplorable. Working with the UN to ensure fundamental human rights exist for all women and girls are an important part of the solution but ensuring their human rights are upheld is a much bigger and complicated challenge.

Despite New Zealand being more advanced in its journey of empowering women there is still some way to go to ensure women have equal recognition and opportunities to men. The traditional roles and societal

expectations of women was greatly discussed at CSW and it was apparent to me that there are vast differences in societal expectations around the world. I expect, for example, that in societies where women do not have rights to land, assets, or inheritance there is no likelihood that they will achieve economic empowerment to be able to earn an independent living or have free choice about their life or their family. We sometimes forget that this is the case and it reminded me of the importance of the United Nations and the work of the various commissions and committees that work within the UN. Without such work many women would have no voice or advocates to advance their cause for human rights.

I thought many of the 2018 CSW62 agreed outcomes are very relevant and pertinent to New Zealand and our own women and girls living in rural areas. Access to education, internet, health services, and work opportunities are real issues for many women in New Zealand who, either by their own choice or by consequence of their family members working on farms in rural and isolated areas, do not have the same level of services or opportunities that are available to their urban and city sisters.

My experience at CSW62 has given me renewed enthusiasm and focus to: support opportunities for women to be involved in decision making; support women to fulfil their individual potential; encourage women to take on roles to make positive impacts in their lives; and to help women develop skills to deal with conflict. In my capacity of National Chair of Rural Women New Zealand there are many learnings from CSW62 to integrate into the work we do to support women and girls living in rural areas in New Zealand.

I thank PWANZ for the opportunity to be part of the CSW62 delegation. It was a wonderful experience and I very much enjoyed the collegiality of the delegation. I look forward to talking about my CSW experience with others and being available to give presentations about the event and the Agreed Outcomes.