



CSW62 Advocacy Report

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Consultation Day

At the Manhattan Community College, we began the day with a Nepalese harvest dance. The atmosphere is always exciting. Friends from all over the world are renewing acquaintance. At CSW 62 there were 189 countries represented and 10,000 attendees, 452 side events (organized by governments) and over 300 parallel events (organized by NGOs now renamed collectively as civil society).

What is different this year At UN Women? A new representative for rural women. We understand now that issues are interrelated: health, education, food, violence, a concept known as intersectionality. We need to look at these problems holistically. We also understand the need to implement quickly.

The ED for UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, outlined the problems of rural women: ill paid, working in poor conditions, unconnected, isolated. Agricultural workers are mostly excluded from labour laws. The infrastructure is poor, sanitation, transportation, water is scarce. Girls become child labourers, drop out of school, are raped in the fields or carrying water while the men sit at home drinking beer in some cultures. The money from their labour is made by intermediaries, their caregiving at all ages is unpaid labour. Mostly, they work in the informal sector.

We know the answers but lack the political will. Our job is to create that will! We must create the legal framework. The co-operation and power of the NGOs is critical to delivery on this. Even when there is that legal framework, too often it is not implemented on the ground.

She gave 2 examples of successful interventions in Uganda and Tanzania

Geraldine Byrne Nason, Bureau chair CSW, reminded us that all politics is local, and that local knowledge represents power. The solidarity of urban and rural women is critical because we must win for everybody. An MP elected in the US serves as inspiration for the rest of the women in the world. She urged us not to accept the normalization of unacceptable behaviour and cited the Me, Too movement as an example of how collective action can remedy that situation. We should share the skills we learned and be resilient. If at first we fail, fail better the next time. As well as rocking the cradle, we should rock the system!

If you can't see it, you can't be it! Education is very important and in Ireland, where girls were educated by nuns who believed in and supported girls, we learned to validate others, so lift as you climb, diversify and validate also those you do not like. New structures are needed, women need to be represented when their lives are discussed in the health system, in family planning women need to be included and represented.

Sizani Ngubane gave the keynote address. The winner of the Women of Distinction Award she founded The Rural Women's Movement in South Africa in 1990, a coalition of 500 organizations and 50,000 members. A Zulu without formal education, she shared a touching story of a 10-year-old girl abducted, raped and forced to marry a man 15 years older. When raped a girl had to marry her rapist.

An uncle took her to 3 men who raped her all night and then forced her to write a letter to her grandma saying she is in love and wants to marry a man. Six cows were exchanged, and she ended up committing suicide.

2% of people own the land and women grow 80% of the food. The leaders are corrupt.

A typical rural girl gets up at 1am to get water so she can get home safe with her 25 litres, waits 7-8 hours and then walks to school for 2 ½ hours.

Thanks to women's efforts. In Kwazulu Natal, the traditional council is now 30% women. Women were expected to sit in the corner, had no money or bank accounts and were considered minors and could not sign contracts. Now, however, they are sitting at the table.

In traditional courts, women had to be represented by a man. Now, a woman can act as presiding officer in the absence of the judge.

Sizani Ngubane was an inspiring figure and the subject of much discussion as we broke for lunch.