



**THE ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN AFRICAN REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE**

**HELD IN 3 REGIONS**

**IN 15 AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

**CONVENED BY TAG A LIFE**

**FROM THE 23<sup>RD</sup> TO THE 25<sup>TH</sup> OF NOVEMBER 2021**



**Compiled for TaLI by Chinga Govhati, Isabel Palasida and Judith Machaka**

## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....  | 4  |
| <b>IN COUNTRY PARTNERS</b> .....   | 4  |
| <b>SPONSORS</b> .....  | 5  |
| <b>Foreword from the Executive Director of Tag A Life International and AGYW Convener</b> .....  | 6  |
| <b>ABOUT TALi</b> .....  | 6  |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....   | 8  |
| <b>1.1. An Overview of the Adolescent Girls and Young Women Regional Annual Conference</b> ..... | 8  |
| <b>1.2. Empowerment on the back of a Covid-19 pandemic</b> .....                                 | 8  |
| <b>1.3. Thematic areas covered</b> .....   | 9  |
| <b>1.4. Objectives of the Conference</b> .....   | 9  |
| <b>1.5. Outcomes of the Conference</b> .....   | 10 |
| <b>1.6. Envisaged Impact</b> .....   | 10 |
| <b>1.7. How did TaLi achieve its planned objectives?</b> .....                                   | 11 |
| <b>1.8. Participation</b> .....  | 11 |
| <b>2. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS</b> .....   | 12 |
| <b>2.1. Overview</b> .....   | 12 |
| <b>2.2. Welcome remarks</b> .....  | 12 |
| <b>3. REGIONAL STATUS OF AFRICAN GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN</b> .....                                 | 13 |
| <b>3.1. EAST AFRICA REGION</b> .....   | 13 |
| <b>3.1.1. IN COUNTRY REPORTS</b> .....   | 13 |
| <b>a. KENYA</b> .....  | 13 |
| <b>b. UGANDA</b> .....   | 15 |
| <b>d. TANZANIA</b> .....   | 24 |
| <b>e. ETHIOPIA</b> .....   | 29 |
| <b>a. KENYA GROUP</b> .....  | 31 |
| <b>b. UGANDA GROUP</b> .....   | 31 |
| <b>c. RWANDA GROUP</b> .....   | 31 |
| <b>3.2. SOUTHERN AFRICA IN COUNTRY REPORTS</b> .....   | 33 |
| <b>3.2.1. IN COUNTRY REPORTS</b> .....   | 33 |
| <b>a. ZIMBABWE</b> .....   | 33 |
| <b>b. MALAWI</b> .....   | 37 |

|               |  |    |
|---------------|--|----|
| c.            | <b>SOUTH AFRICA</b> .....  | 39 |
| d.            | <b>ESWATINI</b> .....  | 41 |
| <b>3.2.2.</b> | <b>SOUTHEN AFRICAN REGION – BREAK AWAY REPORTING</b> .....                           | 44 |
| a.            | <b>MALAWI GROUP</b> .....  | 44 |
| b.            | <b>SOUTH AFRICA GROUP</b> .....  | 44 |
| c.            | <b>ESWATINI GROUP</b> .....  | 45 |
| d.            | <b>ZIMBABWE GROUP</b> .....  | 46 |
| <b>3.3.</b>   | <b>WEST AFRICA REGION</b> .....  | 47 |
| <b>3.3.1.</b> | <b>COUNTRY POSITIONS</b> .....   | 47 |
| a.            | <b>SIERRA LEONE</b> .....  | 47 |
| b.            | <b>GHANA</b> .....   | 52 |
| c.            | <b>LIBERIA</b> .....   | 55 |
| d.            | <b>NIGERIA</b> .....   | 58 |
| <b>3.3.2.</b> | <b>WEST AFRICA BREAK AWAY GROUP REPORTING</b> .....                                  | 60 |
| a.            | <b>GHANA GROUP</b> .....   | 60 |
| b.            | <b>NIGERIA GROUP</b> .....   | 60 |
| c.            | <b>SIERRA LEONE GROUP</b> .....  | 61 |
| d.            | <b>LIBERIA GROUP</b> .....   | 61 |
| <b>4.</b>     | <b>PRESENTATIONS ON EVIDENCE BUILDING, ADVOCACY AND COMMUNIQUE DEVELOPMENT</b> ..... | 62 |
| <b>4.1.</b>   | <b>Evidence building</b> .....   | 62 |
| <b>4.2.</b>   | <b>Advocacy at local, national, regional and international levels</b> .....          | 62 |
| <b>4.3.</b>   | <b>Developing the communique</b> .....   | 63 |
| <b>5.</b>     | <b>DEVELOPING THE COMMUNIQUE</b> .....   | 64 |
| <b>6.</b>     | <b>CONFERENCE KEY NOTE ADDRESSES AND SOLIDARITY MESSAGES</b> .....                   | 66 |
| <b>6.1.</b>   | <b>Solidarity Messages from in country partners</b> .....                            | 66 |
| <b>6.2.</b>   | <b>Key note addresses</b> .....  | 66 |
| <b>7.</b>     | <b>CONFERENCE EVALUATION</b> .....   | 71 |
|               | <b>CONFERENCE PICTURES</b> .....   | 72 |

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Tag A Life International acknowledges the support and solidarity that it got from stakeholders from all walks of life. Chief amongst these are the Adolescent Girls and Young Women, AGYW, from East, West and Southern Africa represented as follows;

- a. East Africa- Rwanda,** Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya
- b. West Africa-** Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Senegal
- c. Southern Africa-** South Africa, Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe

The in-country coordinators, the 300 physical and virtual AGYW conference participants, TaLi members of staff who worked tirelessly to make the conference the resounding success it became and the partners, stakeholders and TaLi friends who took time to be in attendance and on panel discussions.

## IN COUNTRY PARTNERS

| NAME OF ORGANISATION   | COUNTRY                |
|--|------------------------|
| Raising Teenagers Uganda                                       | Uganda                 |
| Girls Aid Movement (GAM)                                       | Sierra Leone           |
| Aspire Debate Rwanda   | Rwanda                 |
| Polycom Kenya  | Kenya                  |
| Hope Centre for Children, Girls and Women in Tanzania (HCCGWT) | Tanzania               |
| Youth Inspire Initiative                                       | Nigeria                |
| Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA)     | Zambia                 |
| Economic Justice for Women Project (EJWP)                      | Zimbabwe               |
| Society for the Improvement of Rural People (SIRP)             | Nigeria                |
| African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)           | Sudan                  |
| Society for the Study of Women's Health (SSWH)                 | The Gambia             |
| Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT)                                   | Zimbabwe               |
| One Billion Rising Campaign                                    |                        |
| Global Institute for Women's Empowerment Group (GIWE GROUP)    | Republic of Seychelles |
| Associates For Change (AFC)                                    | Ghana                  |
| New Millennium Women Empowerment Organisation (NMWEO)          | Ethiopia               |
| Afrika Tikkun  | South Africa           |
| Young Urban Women (YUW)  |                        |

## **SPONSORS**

The contributions made by our funding partners to the conference are acknowledged as well with much gratitude. To these partners, TaLi and the rest of AGYW say, “Thank You!”

- 1. IDRC/CRDI**  
**International Development Research Centre**  
**Centre de recherches pour le developpement international**
- 2. Canadian Embassy**
- 3. Global Fund for Women**
- 4. Bill Cook Foundation**
- 5. Urgent Action Fund Africa- For Women’s Human Rights**
- 6. African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF)**
- 7. Tag a Life International (TaLI)**

## Foreword from the Executive Director of Tag A Life International and AGYW Convener



We would not have been able to pull together the AGYW Africa first ever Conference had it not been for the incredible support of the in country partners who coordinated locally, worked with us to mobilize the girls in each country, prepare them for the conference, worked together on the country position papers and made sure

the girls and young women attended the conference the entire 3 days, and ensured their data support and all else they needed during the period. Despite that TaLI through the funding partners provided for financial support, the in-country partners put in their own resources to compliment and make the conference a success. Their cooperation, trust of us as this was the first time to work together, dedication and enthusiasm made the conference possible. We are looking forward to fruitful and more dedicated engagements with these like-minded partners even as we will grow the work in each of these countries, we hope such relationships grow deeper and stronger together.

**Ms Nyaradzo Nyari Mashayamombe**  
**Conveyer ~ AGYW Africa.**

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### ABOUT TALI

Tag a Life International Trust (TaLI) is a girls and young women's rights organisation working to advance the rights of girls and young women in Africa. TaLI envisions a 'Safe World' where girls and young women are free to dream, empowered to become whatever they want to be, a world where girls and boys are treated equally in every aspect of life, where children or young people will be allowed to be themselves enjoying their equal rights. TaLI is doing this through creating a safe place for the girls and young women; building their **agency** and **voice**, so that they may create **movements**, as well as engage

boys, men, communities and leaders to address negative gender norms while advancing their rights.

*“The conference is a platform of hope for the AGYW to reclaim their power and begin to feed into all key conversations at all levels towards their inclusion and strategic redress of all their key issues.”  
Zimbabwe*

*“The conference made me see issues that other Adolescent Girls and Young Women are facing and issues that I as an individual was facing but was unaware of and ignorant about. Hence it made me to begin advocating for the betterment of the Adolescent Girls and Young Women and to help in capacitating them”- Tanzania*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. An Overview of the Adolescent Girls and Young Women Regional Annual Conference**

TaLI has for the past years conducted physical annual conferences in Zimbabwe as a way to empower girls and young women from different parts of the country, as part of the holistic empowerment programmes. The conferences have been a place of elevating their voices, increased networking and building solidarity as young women who would have gone through our other empowerment programmes such as the one year ‘Leadership Economic Mentorship Hubs - LEMHs Programme’ that TaLI implements to raise young women leaders. Young women are largely discriminated against based on gender, sex and age in Zimbabwe. The same can be said for their counterparts in Africa. At the core of their identity, is a complex patriarchal society which classifies the discrimination of young women as a necessary practice to rein them into oblivion where participation in public processes remains a dream. In wake of this, it is critical to note that a lot of young women have been denied the chance of living dignified lives because they are confined in the home with no chance to rise beyond the domestic role which they are culturally assigned to. As is the frame of empowerment for young women, they have largely remained obscured with very little avenue for expansion as they remain confined in the private space even though much work has been done by the women’s movement in the past 4 decades. As one of its strategies, TaLI directs its efforts towards the inclusion of girls and young women in leadership, ensuring that their issues are on the continental agenda, fostering political participation as well as in democracy, governance and human rights as the world grapples with autocracy and transparency as a result of forced Covid-19 restrictions and solutions. As it does this, it makes use of regional and national instruments that support AGYW empowerment and leadership such as; CEDAW, Maputo, Agenda 2063, GEWE by AU, country constitutions to give impetus to its advocacy efforts especially where implementation and reforms are needed.

### **1.2. Empowerment on the back of a Covid-19 pandemic**

Furthermore, the COVID- 19 pandemic has brought about immense changes in the social, economic and psychosocial constructs. These have negatively impacted the status of girls



and young women especially with regards to economic empowerment, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR) violations, Gender Based Violence and peace building, and access to education, access to Covid-19 vaccinations. Issues of participation in governance, democracy, human rights, ICTs and the impact of climate and environment remain key as the world grapples with the pandemic. The world is refocusing its efforts on rebuilding economies while learning to live with the pandemic. Africa too is faced with poor resources, corruption and misplaced priorities. It is critical that at this stage girls and young women have a say on ensuring that as Africa rebuilds from the pandemic, girls and young women's issues are on the agenda. The main agenda of the conference was to bring together girls from Southern, West and East Africa to share their experiences, create and input into an agenda that should also contribute to Africa's priorities as it rebuilds from Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the status quo, it has eroded the developmental gains achieved over the last decades that includes the gains of women and girls empowerment which came over a struggle both changing communities and laws, while resources have always been contested. As the globe fights to get back to normal life under the limited and eroded resources, usually women and girls issues are thrown at the end of the priorities, they occupy peripherals. It is critical that those who care to support women and girls empowerment mobilise and have the girls define their own agenda and register their concerns and make their demands in resources allocation in our continent as well as the world. The conference allowed African girls to come together to make their issues known and to help them demand for resource allocation to their issues.

### **1.3. Thematic areas covered**

Six holistic thematic areas in empowering adolescent girls and young women were adopted for the 2021 Annual Conference.

1. Adolescent Girls and Young Women Empowerment (Economic and Leadership Participation)
2. Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Peace Building
3. Education and Psycho Social Support
4. SRHR and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Management / Covid-19
5. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)
6. Environment and Climate Change

Advocacy was a cut-across issue across all thematic areas.

### **1.4. Objectives of the Conference**

1. To build girls and young women solidarity and movements across the region.

2. To bring AGYW issues on the African Agenda during and post Covid-19
3. To bring exposure and promote cultural exchange among AGYW in Southern, East and Western parts of Africa
4. To build solidarity among AGYW and organisations that work with girl related issues.

### **1.5. Outcomes of the Conference**

- Engagement of 300 girls and young women from 3 regions of Africa;
  - a) Southern Africa- South Africa, Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe
  - b) East Africa- Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya
  - c) West Africa- Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Senegal
- A Communique on the resolutions of the girls and young women pertaining their situation was developed for submission to national, sub-national and regional change agents with the ultimate aim of reaching the African Union and to input into the broader AU Agenda.
- A ‘Situation Paper on the Lives of AGYW in East and Southern Africa in Covid-19’ will be developed for publication in regional magazines from this report.

### **1.6. Envisaged Impact**

The Conference as, expected, brought a positive impact in the lives of AGYW in Southern, West and East African girls and young women through educating them on the six thematic areas. Short term fruits are planned as follows;

- a) Have their voice heard at the African Union in demanding for allocation of resources to protect their rights and welfare.
- b) Build movements within their communities and countries at large.
- c) Have the ability to build solidarity with other girls and young women organisations within their regions.
- d) Be champions/advocates/change-makers for women empowerment and the protection of women rights.
- e) Have an appreciation of different cultures within the SADC region and be equipped with information on how to fight harmful cultural practices

### **Expected long term impacts are;**

- a. Equality of women and men in Africa as resources are equally distributed

- b. To witness more young women holding leadership positions,
- c. To see AGYW initiating change in their communities and the region,
- d. AGYW being accountable on issues that concern them.
- e. Amplified voices in the face of debilitating challenges such as Covid-19 and climate change.

### **1.7. How did TaLi achieve its planned objectives?**

TaLi partnered with strategic organisations within the 15 countries from East, West and Southern Africa to bring the girls and young women together for this regional conference. In each country TaLi appointed one partnering organisation called ‘The In-Country Partner’ which became the national point/lead organisation responsible for the recruitment and participation of the girls and young women from that country. TaLi then sent out a call for lead organisations in the targeted countries. The partner organisations supported the girls and young women participation through provision of the mentorship support, data for preparatory work before the conference and also with costs of data for young women in their country during the conference, and any such costs related to the conference. The countries met at centres where they would attend together the regional conference online.

### **1.8. Participation**

15 countries from three regions in Africa being; East Africa (Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya), Southern Africa (South Africa, Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe) and West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Senegal) came together to interrogate factors militating against 300 girls’ and young women’s road to self-actualisation.

## **2. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

### **2.1. Overview**

The first day of the conference was packed. The Convener of the Conference, Ms Nyaradzo Mashayamombe, gave the welcome remarks and outlined the objectives of the three day meeting. East Africa and Southern Africa presented their in country reports on the first day. Each country from the 5 countries in each region had a representative who presented on the status of AGYW in their country across the 6 thematic areas.

After the reports, the regions got into breakaway groups that included other participants in attendance. A region followed its presentation with a break away session. The breakaway sessions brought depth to the issues in different countries but also gave the other participants an opportunity to share experiences and best practices.

The second day started with Southern Africa breakaway groups presenting on the findings of their deliberations in Day One. West Africa then presented on in country positions before breaking into groups and a presentation on final positions made. Three key presentations were made by Ms Nyaradzo Mashayamombe on effective evidence building for advocacy and by Chinga Govhati on understanding advocacy and developing a communique. A panel discussion on evidence building in Africa was led by Ms Nyaradzo Mashayamombe.

The third and last day was an exciting one for the participants as they got an opportunity to mix and mingle with high dignitaries from Canada, Tanzania, the Bill Cook Foundation, ILO Special Advisor Ms Elizabeth Nyamayaro, in country Partners, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, the representatives of Ministries and finally to present their communique. The Convener gave the final remarks and the way forward inviting present partners such as embassies present to support the initiative in various ways.

### **2.2. Welcome remarks**

The Convener, Ms Nyaradzo Mashayamombe, quipped *“Africa should provide a platform for young women to come to the decision making table. This is in view of the fact that gains on empowering women have been eroded by Covid 19.”* She further urged girls to participate: *“your story is important; share it!”* She also explained that the conference would empower the young women and girls with networking skills, exposure to the advocacy and high level leadership where they can build solidarity with each other over their issues such as access to education, reproductive health rights, the impact of climate and environment, elimination of GBV especially rape, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, economic empowerment, political participation among issues that affect their lives.

### 3. REGIONAL STATUS OF AFRICAN GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

#### 3.1. EAST AFRICA REGION

##### 3.1.1. IN COUNTRY REPORTS

###### a. KENYA – Represented by Anna Agaw

###### Key Highlights

A recent report from Kibera indicated that girls in Kenya are sexually harassed before the age of 13 .  
*“Every young woman before reaching the age of 13 is either sexually harassed or sexually abused”*

###### Recommendations

*“Ensure policy implementation, increase number of women in political and leadership spaces, commit to, identify and plug the gaps and biases we all have towards AGYW.”-Anna Agaw*

Anna Agaw quoted the UNICEF Survey which indicated that 17% of girls and young women in Kenya experienced violence during Covid 19. This happened when schools were closed and when girls and women were locked in with perpetrators. Vulnerable women and girls especially those with disabilities, those living in slums and the not so aligned to gender were adversely affected by hostile environments, crime, drugs, poor sanitation, lack of recreation with limited SRHR outcomes. Her key message was *“ensure policy implementation, increase number of women in political and leadership spaces, commit to, identify and plug the gaps and biases we all have towards AGYW.”*

Her key submissions included the following;

- ✓ *“Little attention has been paid to meet the needs of children and address gender-based violence challenges. And also the specific needs of adolescent girls especially in poor urban setups such as Nairobi slums.”*
- ✓ She also submitted that despite the existence of the Sexual Offences Act, *“Sexual violence disproportionately affect women and girls as compared to boys. It poses serious impacts to gender justice and democratic, social and career development as well as a barrier to achievement of SGD’s.”*
- ✓ A recent report from Kibera indicated that girls in Kenya are sexually harassed before the age of 13 . *“Every young woman before reaching the age of 13 is either sexually harassed or sexually abused”*

- ✓ There are huge implementation gaps of available policies as women don't occupy key political and decision-making positions in Kenya. *“There is no meaningful and sustainable participation of women in political leadership positions. We are yet to achieve the total gender rule.”*

## **Recommendations**

- ✓ Need for meaningful participation on political and decision making
- ✓ Need to commit in identifying gaps and *‘bringing justice within ourselves to address the challenges facing young women in their diversity hence regardless of disability, whether in rural or urban setups.’*

## **Covid-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had major negative impacts on all aspects of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW's) lives. According to a [UNICEF survey](#) conducted on the effects of the pandemic on adolescent girls in Kenya, 17% said that *“girls like them”* have experienced violence during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. These factors have had an impact on the participation and representation of youth, particularly young women, in decision-making.

## **Adolescent girls' issues**

In Kenya, adolescents make up a considerable proportion of urban populations, and many of them live in the numerous informal settlements or slums in Nairobi. *“Adolescents living in the slums face a distinct set of challenges as they transition to adulthood in a hostile environment characterized by high levels of unemployment, crime, poor sanitation, substance abuse, poor education facilities, and lack of recreational facilities.”* While much had been done to provide insights into adolescents' sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes in the country, little attention had been paid to understanding and meeting the SRHR and Gender based violence challenges and needs specific to adolescents living in resource strapped rural areas and poor urban settings, such as the slums of Nairobi.

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<sup>1</sup> [Tracking the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent girls in Kenya | UNICEF Kenya](#)

## **SRHR**

The [National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy](#)<sup>2</sup> aims to enhance SRH status of adolescents in Kenya and contribute towards realization of their full potential in national development. The Policy brings adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights issues into the country's mainstream health and development agenda. Despite the above policy aspirations, "*adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in Kenya still faced serious challenges to fulfilling their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).*" The adolescent birth rate in Kenya is twice the global rate of unintended and unsafe pregnancy as it stood at 92 births per 1,000 girl in 2021. AGYW continued to be at higher risk of HIV, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) compared to adolescent boys and young men (ABYM).

The current reality in Kenya, despite the existence of **The Sexual Offences Act 2016**<sup>3</sup>, is that sexual violence disproportionately affected women and girls. Wherever sexual violence occurred, it was a major obstacle for the achievement of gender justice, posing a serious threat to democratic social, and career development.

### **Violence against AGYW**

Despite policy developments and key legislations that have been undertaken and geared at gender equality and protection, including the Constitution of Kenya 2010, Sexual Offences Act 2006, sexual harassment was the most extreme evidence of unequal gender relations in society. Its impact cut across boundaries of economic wealth, culture, religion, age, and sexual orientation.

### **Recommendation**

The recommendation by delegates was that the Kenyan government and law enforcement agencies operationalize the existing policies and laws to ensure adolescent girls and young women's rights are protected and they receive quality public SRHR and SGBV services. It defeats the purpose of having strict laws and good policies if they only exist on paper. More stringent action was needed from the Kenyan Police and on cases of sexual harassment and sexual abuse as well as greater accountability from judicial officers and paralegals in following up on cases.

### **b. UGANDA- Situation Report By Darren Namatovu. Representing**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://aphrc.org/publication/kenya-national-adolescent-sexual-and-reproductive-health-policy/#>:

<sup>3</sup> [http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2016/TheSexualOffences\\_Amendment\\_Bill\\_\\_2016.pdf](http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2016/TheSexualOffences_Amendment_Bill__2016.pdf)

## Raising Teenagers Uganda

### Key Highlight

*Participation of women and girls has been hindered by prejudicial patriarchal and gender stereotyping that views women as inferior to men.*

### Recommendations

*“There is need to empower girls to tell them that they can lead any position without fear”  
“Leaders need to address negative gender norms while advancing their rights.”-suggested Darren Namatovu*

The main issue that young girls are facing have been spearheaded by the novel Covid 19. This has been reflected by the 75 % maternal mortality rate of young women giving birth as there is limited access to antenatal care.. Concern was also raised around climate change, SRHR, leadership limitations, limited AGYW participation, GBV and HIV. An unimaginable 40% increase was recorded on FGM on girls during lockdown. FGM is a concerning plague that results in painful menstruation, labour pains and loss of self-esteem. The key messages were *‘make ARVs widely available, reduce global emissions to curb climate change, ensure adequate psychosocial support in schools for girls suffering GBV.’* She further said *“we can’t achieve GBV free communities without involving the perpetrators.”*

Uganda is ranked amongst the African countries with the most prevalent teenage pregnancies and teenage birth rates of over 120,000 according to ministry of health and 75% maternal mortality ever since the Covid19 pandemic started. In 2020 there was a global decrease of ten percent in sexual reproductive and health services in low- and middle-income countries which led to over 50million young women and adolescents around the world unable to access antenatal care and sex education.

### Recommendations

- *“There is need to engage young on the issues that affects them sexually and teach them to be careful.”*
- *“There is need to ensure accessibility ARV and psychosocial support to victims of FGM. Psychosocial support to victims of violence especially during the pandemic. The pandemic has lasted for more than two years now and several cases of depression seem to exist amongst victims.”*
- *“Climate change must also be addressed from a gender perspective, there are cases of forced marriages for exchange of dowry.”*



- *“There is need to address the effects that being posed by emissions of fossil fuels that are affecting whether patterns.”*
- *“Economic status- low income reduced by 30% meant parent unable to send their children to school. It’s important for development and government to directly invest in empowerment of girls.”*

**Climate change, peace building, SRHR HIV/Aids, Education, Leadership participation, GBV human rights, psychosocial support**

*“All these affect the Adolescent girls and young women in Uganda in different ways with linkages. This is how each aspect has and continues to affect the AGYW and what we can do to minimise the percentage increase;”*

**i. SRHR, HIV/AIDS**

With the current global chaos resulting from Covid19 pandemic, the impact on adolescent girls and young women *“sexual reproductive rights are not only making headlines but have had truly devastating impacts on millions of adolescent girls and young women.”* Many girls have died in labour rooms because they were unable to access the health services that they need for them to have safe deliveries during Covid 19. There is need to make the sexual and reproductive health services accessible to all adolescents and young women to avoid the latter. Sadly *“young adolescent girls have been sexually assaulted by men with HIV/AIDs which has turned many into HIV/AID victims, there is need to make ARVs accessible to the girls and also provide psychosocial support to the victims.”*

**ii. Climate change**

It was also important to note that the climate change crisis has had brutal impacts on adolescent girls and young women which included forced marriages, *“parents have been devastated with their farms destroyed by the strong winds, heavy rains and dry seasons so they force girls into marriage in exchange for dowry as survival.”* With the water sources getting dry, girls now move long distances to fetch water which has made them targets for rape, and defilement thus teenage pregnancy, loss of self-esteem and confidence are the results. The impact of unpaid care work is evident here as a burden for girls. *“Girls have been forced to drop out of school as the parents can no longer manage paying school fees due to poor harvests because of the climate change.”* Uganda has one of the fastest changing weather patterns and this has hugely affected the AGYW.

*“Uganda is one of the country with a fast changing climate situation and is affecting adolescent girls and young women in general”*

There is need to reduce global emissions and *“educate parents and all stakeholders that while we have a crisis, we cannot put the lives of innocent girls at risk but rather look for other solutions like planting more trees, reducing fossil fuels and emissions,”* Daryl concluded

### **iii. Mental Health and Psychosocial support**

The pandemic has caused depression, anxiety among young people with the lockdown of over 2 years resulting from defilement, domestic violence and rape from the close relatives who are meant to protect them, so psychosocial support was needed for these young girls which unfortunately was not available. *“It is important that schools plan to incorporate professional counselling for young people and also provide positive parenting programs so that children can be safe in their homes.”*

### **iv. Economic status**

The economic statuses of many families drastically changed with a fall in the incomes and this meant that sending all the children to school was now harder for parents. It was *“important for development partners and government to invest in direct sponsorship for the affected and under privileged children. Girls who have been victims of teenage pregnancy should be supported to return to school to allow them study and achieve their dreams and aspirations.”*

### **v. GBV**

Daryl reported that *“this is one of the area in which the whole world is preparing with regards to 16 Days of Activism against gender based violence. We need the leaders to come up with vocal mechanism to approach Gender based Violence and the women and young girls need to be educated about their rights and responsibilities so that they are able to thrive in accommodative environments. All stakeholders must be engaged including the perpetrators. Girls must be empowered to speak out against victimization so that they are able to assert their rights.”*

### **vi. Leadership participation, Human rights and Peace Buildings**

In Uganda, girls and women are not given top positions in leadership and this was started at schools. The patriarchy and stereotyping manifested in many gender roles like how culture said that a girl needed to be below a boy and this had led to gender inequality with boys taking themselves as superiors. *“Policy makers need to emphasize equal*

*representation of all genders/sexes by providing civic education to the Adolescent Girls and Young women.”*

### **Recommendations by the in country delegates to their national government**

- *“Invest in education- Young girls have been badly affected by Covid-19 pandemic including those that have fallen victims to teenage pregnancies during the resultant lockdowns.”*
- *“Prioritise provision of psychosocial support to young girls while still in school.”*

### **Recommendations to development partners**

- *“Adolescent Girls and Young women should be able to access SRHR services easily.”*
- *“Development partners should invest in direct education sponsorship for Underprivileged Girls that cannot afford to go back to school.”*
- *“Positive Parenting Programs should be prioritised and parents equipped with skills that facilitate open communication with their children.”*
- *“Proper sensitisation about climate change, proper waste management as well as afforestation and the dangers related to deforestation are necessary.”*

### **c. RWANDA Represented by Aspire Debate Rwanda**

#### **Key Highlight**

Rwanda as a best practice in policy revision, education and SRHR, affirmative action, open doors for women to prosper, increase in women led organisations, increase in women assuming decision making positions with a 62% occupancy rate in parliament, psychosocial support to mitigate GBV and responsive policy formulation.

#### **Recommendation**

“CSO’s must also work hand in hand to provide solutions.”-Aspire Debate Rwanda

Aspire Debate Rwanda presented Rwanda as a best practice in policy revision, education and SRHR, affirmative action, open doors for women to prosper, increase in women led organisations, increase in women assuming decision making positions with a 62% occupancy rate in parliament, psychosocial support to mitigate GBV and responsive policy formulation. Concern was however raised on increased teenage pregnancies, Covid 19, poverty and limited information on SRHR. Law No 68 of 2018 on curbing GBV was applauded. Her major recommendations were around reducing nuclear footprints to make the world a safe place for girls and respond more to teenage pregnancies.

### **Education and human rights**

In Rwanda, one of the areas that have seen more progress is Education and Human Rights, as since the inception of the country’s constitution in 2003 and formalization of the its first development agenda ‘Vision 2020’, girls and women access to education was promoted at all levels, targeted interventions were made like affirmative actions of adding of 1.5 points on the qualification points for higher education was installed.

*“This in turn enabled many girls to join higher institutions of learning which improved their social and intellectual status. In addition, high-end schools promoting girl-child education were established such as Gashora Girls Academy, Maranyundo Girls School, Dove School to mention but a few, all aimed to empower young girls by offering high class education.”*

*“Like never before, in the constitution the women right to property was recognized. This was a game changer as it broke the cultural barriers and toxic beliefs that had for years made women to be economically subjective to their male counterparts. This had been always made severe after the death of male companion because the family of the husband used to claim the property and assets living the wife in balance. But this changed after the establishment of the law. “*

### **Empowerment and income generating power**

The Constitutional “*right to property did only change the social structures but it opened the door for women and girls to actively participate in income generating activities. But as time went on other interventions have been made like the establishment of Women-led Business Umbrella Organizations (Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs and Private Sector Federation Women League). Such organizations have been on the frontline defending and advocating for more involvement of women in business and other economic activities.*”

### **Leadership and participation**

Other areas where women have triumphed are in leadership “*where at all levels of leadership, it was now mandatory according to the law, women have to at least occupy 30% of the leadership positions. But this has not stopped them from taking on and occupying more than the mandated threshold like currently over 50% of cabinet ministers are women and more than 62% members of parliament are also women. This in return has motivated and increased confidence and self-esteem among women and young girls to believe that they can do it too.*”

### **Teenage pregnancies, SRHR and Psycho-social Support**

In terms of psychosocial support, there has been some strides made by the government through the Ministry of Education together with Civil Society Organization. “*They established a girl’s room at every secondary school. This is meant to provide counselling, female sanitary towels and a safe space for girl child to open up and their sexual reproductive health life. Secondly other interventions like Isange-One-Stop center, established at every District don’t only provide psychotherapy to victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence but also a reporting mechanism of these predatory behaviors. This is also intended to eliminate a culture of silence especially on cases of victimization in a family setup.*”

Although such interventions have been put in place, there is huge prevalence of teenage pregnancy with year-on-year increase from 6.1% in 2014 to 7.3% in 2017 with 85% in secondary school going teenage girls. “*This has been a bigger reminder to the government and civil society to work around the clock to come up with the most innovative and targeted intervention to curb the vice.*”

In the report published in 2017 by a local Non-government organization (Imbuto Foundation) on the SRHR situation in the country it highlighted three key findings; “*1) Inaccessibility of accurate information about SRHR among youth, 2) Unfavorable law that requires teens below 18 years to be escorted by a parent or guardian to ask for any*

*family planning service or product and 3) poverty which makes girls from poor families vulnerable to sex offenders.”*

### **Sexual Violence and HIV**

Despite that there has been a significant decrease in sexual and Gender based violence thanks partly to the Law No 68/2018 of 30/08/2018 which criminalizes and defines four types of GBV: bodily, economic, sexual and psychological; social and cultural beliefs pose challenges to reporting of GBV. She indicated that *“This has been much fueled by the social structures where some of the victims are threatened or stigmatized as the communities or families fear shame and disrespect”*

For HIV/AIDS the country has recorded significant progress as today the prevalence is standing at just 3% but with more prevalent in women (3.7%) than 2.2% in males. To continue the fight the government recently announced a plan to pilot universal access to HIV prevention medicine.

### **Information, Communication and Technology**

ICT is one of the key major drivers of Rwanda’s national economic development agenda, Girls and women participation has been prioritized through affirmative actions and other targeted interventions. Like in admission for science courses at advanced secondary level and universities, *“girls are always considered first and this has increased their participation”*. Second partnering with civil society, some targeted programs like ‘She Can Code’ and ‘We code’ on the smaller scale have been launched all aimed at having more girls in this budding sector.

### **Environment and climate change**

On the environment the country has not only committed to reducing its nuclear foot-print by 30% in 2030 but it has made women lead the challenge through appointing the female minister to lead the Ministry of environment. And secondly, *“the country's climate change investment fund facility (FONERWA) is also managed by a young woman. The fund was establish to funnel and monitor investment in climate resilience and adaptation programs.”*

### **Recommendations**

Given this situational analysis of these various thematic, though the Government has made great strides to address the challenges being faced by adolescents, women and young girls, there is still room for improvement through adopting the following recommendations:-

- *“Government must reinforce its programs targeting to providing solutions to these prevailing issues.”*

*“CSO’s must also work hand in hand to provide solutions.”*

#### **d. TANZANIA- represented by Shamira -Women in Leadership”)**

##### **Key Highlights**

“An economy can only become vibrant and useful to girls if the government creates a space for them to get employed and skill them to be employed.”

“Tanzanian legal framework and promises make it difficult for young women to effectively participate in leadership positions, the age restrictions on presidential and parliamentary candidates are a case point”

##### **Key recommendation**

There is a need to capacitate the women, ensuring they get enough education which can be a basis for their uplifting-Shamira

The representative from Tanzania gave a projection of frightening numbers of girls affected by various issues. In a country with a population of 16 million, 12 million identified as youths and 4, 8 million were girls and young women. She bemoaned the gains eroded by Covid-19; non-participation of women in the 2020 elections, poor health outcomes, poor laws and policies, limited decision making due to policies and practices that prejudice women such as the requirement of USD50 000 to be admitted as an aspiring candidate and age, social and cultural limitations. According to the presenters observation an *“economy can only become vibrant and useful to girls if the government creates a space for them to get employed and skill them to be employed.”* On climate change, she recommended *“policies that make it easier for girls affected by climate change to recover and become emancipated.”*

#### **Adolescents’ challenges**

The representatives from Tanzania highlighted a number of challenges which are faced by adolescents and young women in accessing education;

- *“Tanzanian policies are that all adolescent girls and young women are supposed to be at school, but some fail to make it to school due to the challenges which stem from a number of things which include;*
  - i. Poor education environment,*
  - ii. Unfriendly laws and policies,*
  - iii. Poor health and sanitation and*
  - iv. Climate change.*

*These factors heavily impact on the adolescents.”*



## **Challenges faced by women and adolescent girls in getting into leadership positions**

*“Despite women totaling 4.6 million and adolescents registering 4.2 million of the Tanzanian population, few women make it to the position of power. Opportunities for women to secure Leadership positions are quite slim.”*

A number of factors hinder women participation in leadership positions. The factors include *“severe harassment. This was noted in 2020 when Tanzania held national elections, the harassment was both online and offline with name calling being the most used instrument by the perpetrators.”* Many women who sought political offices were regarded as “prostitutes”, a demeaning word in Tanzania.

Ageism is also a factor which hinders women to seek for opportunities in leadership positions. In Tanzania, political office is a reserve for the elderly. *“For one to be a presidential candidate, one has to be over 41 years of age as stipulated in the Tanzanian Constitution. For those seeking for parliamentary positions, they have to be over the age of 27. All these factors hinder young women to actively participate in political and other and exclude the young from seeking political positions. This is made worse by the educational curriculum which has little to offer on leadership training.”*

Socio-cultural norms also make it difficult for women to reach leadership positions, *“oft times women are excluded from making key decisions at the family level, they are left out in being prepared to make key decisions later on in life. The skills of making key decisions are denied young women at a very tender age.”*

Also as noted above, Tanzanian legal framework s make it difficult for young women to effectively participate in leadership positions, the age restrictions on presidential and parliamentary candidates are a case in point.

## **Poverty**

Widespread poverty in Tanzania has not spared adolescent girls and young women, this is worsened mainly because of lack of quality education and enough training. *“Adolescent and young women lag behind and find it difficult to move out of poverty.”* Tanzanian representatives noted that about 14 million Tanzania live in poverty with 68 percent of the population living on less than a \$1 a day.

*COVID 19 pandemic worsened the situation by hindering a lot of economic activities;*

- *A spike in early and forced marriages was recorded during the covid 19 tough period.*

- *Unemployment rate which worsened because of Covid 19 has worsened the socio-economic environment which women live in.*
- *Some young women were married off during this period.*

### **Mental health**

Due to prevailing economic challenges in Tanzania, “with a sizeable number of the population living on less than a dollar a day, this has impacted heavily on young women and adolescents.” Cases of stress and depression are notable and this has a negative impact on the overall academic or social or professional performance of young women. *“A recent WHO report has indicated that about 7 million Tanzanians have mental issues.”*

### **Sexual and reproductive health rights**

*“The sharp increase in HIV infections and deaths from AIDS were threatening girls and young women. In those areas most seriously affected, HIV/AIDS was spreading fastest among young people.” “Most girls are subjected to genital mutilation, a degrading and dangerous practice sometimes dignified with the name ‘female circumcision.’”*

### **Sexual violence against AGYW**

*“Rape and other forms of sexual violence were increasing, and young women tended to fall victim to intimate violence more often than did older women. Sex work, rather than being simply the free market or moral decision of independent women to sell their favors, was a major source of further abuse. The number of gender based violence worsened during Tanzania’s 2020 election period, with harassment being the major instrument employed both online and offline.”*

### **Empowerment and participation**

Girls and young women in difficult circumstances have often been left behind in empowerment opportunities because no one thinks about them. *“It is good that fortunately various in country NGOs have helped girls and young women who have been forced into prostitution to become their own agents of change.”*

### **Presentation by Hazizi – Right to Health**

She notes that;

- *Tanzania has unfavorable legal frameworks and policies which have hindered the provision of quality and good health services for women and girls.*
- *The Child Act and the Marriage Act in Tanzania are contradictory, and this makes it hard to have a clear position on the age of consent. The age of consent is in direct contradiction with the age of marriage.*
- *Further, there is a need to address the issue of pregnancies amongst the girls and children, as they are denied to complete their studies. It's a huge problem impacting young women.*
- *GBV is prevalent in Tanzania, at least 25 % of women and girls are sexually exploited. This has a huge bearing on the prevalence of HIV among the youth, with 40 % of the youth infected with HIV. Of the 40% of the youth infections, 80 % of that figure are adolescents and young women.*
- *Lack of comprehensive information, in-depth knowledge about SRH is a huge challenge in Tanzania.*
- *The situation is worse in the rural areas where on top of inadequate information, they have few facilities that cater for their SRH needs. They have to travel long distances to access these services.*
- *Teenage pregnancy is a challenge the numbers ballooned during schools closures due to Covid 19.*
- *Also because of lack of water AGYW cannot clean themselves and have safe and sanitized areas during their menstrual cycles and as a result their SRH is affected.*

### **Climate change**

- *Climate Change has impacted livelihoods of the people, especially those who are agro based.*
- *Due to climate change, sometimes young girls have to travel for long distances to look for water. Time for school is channeled to looking for water (during dry seasons and droughts).*
- *Sometimes in these journey they face a number of violent acts, including rape as they will be in far and remote areas.*

**Recommendations:**

- *There is a need to capacitate the women, ensuring they get enough education which can be a basis for their uplifting.*
- *There is a need to come up with policies which cater for children with disabilities and enable them to access education and other essential services*
- *Opening spaces for women political participation and crafting policies which ensure that women are represented in positions of power is key.*
- *Ensuring safe environments for women and adolescents is the responsibility of government.*
- *Teaching the communities about the green economy and other efficient and sustainable use of the environment will help mitigate climate change challenges.*
- *Harmonizing the Child Act and the Marriage Act will ensure that the age of consent and of marriage speak to each other.*

## e. ETHIOPIA-New Millennium Women Empowerment Organisation

### Key Highlights

The socio economic situations of women make the lives of AGYW harder as they ascend to adulthood. So access to education and information are crucial in creating a better generation of AGYW in Ethiopia.

### Key Recommendation

Access to education and information are crucial in creating a better generation of AGYW

There is no doubt that women are differently affected by *economic* constraints as opposed to their male counterparts. *“Sadly, this includes less access to credit and limited market access. The unmet potential of women in the workforce was said to be intrinsically linked to a lack of opportunities for women in education, health, and human rights.”*

The socio-economic situations of women *“make the lives of AGYW harder as they ascend to adulthood. So, access to education and information are crucial in creating a better generation of AGYW in Ethiopia.”*

A quarter of Ethiopia’s 110 million populations are adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 and more than 53% are under the age of 20. 80 percent of the country’s population resides in rural areas and women provide the majority of the agricultural labor in these communities. *“Adolescent girls are more subjected to farm labor and domestic chores compared to their male counterparts. However, their contributions often go largely unrecognized as unpaid care work and their access to resources and community participation is severely restricted.”*

What is worse is that *“one in three women experience physical, emotional or sexual violence, 65 percent of women have experienced female genital mutilation, and only half of girls who enrolled in primary schools ever made it to Grade 5.”*

### Access to Education

Although the primary school enrollment rate of girls in Ethiopia is 91 percent currently, the majority are unable to transition to secondary and tertiary school due to *“distance, personal security and economic challenges.”* This gives a large majority of adolescent girls and young women who still remain uneducated. *“As girls grow older, their participation in school is difficult because they are expected to help their families with home chores such as agriculture.”*

The report also highlights that only 35 percent of undergraduate university students are female and five percent drop out in the first year. At the same time, female-led institutions

at the university level was extremely low at only 11 percent. *“These lower performances in pursuing higher education was a consequence of AGYW’s burden in farming activities and domestic chores on the one hand and early marriage on the other.”*

### **Decision making and participation**

The report further indicates that *“according to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey in 2016, 30 percent of Ethiopian women do not make decisions on individual and family issues. Instead, their husbands make the decisions for them on choices including the option to use birth control methods, and whether to give birth in a health facility or seek the assistance of a trained provider.”* The current poor performance in secondary and higher education among AGYW aggravated the poor position of women in decision making within the society. Additionally, *“harmful traditional practices—early marriage and childbearing, female genital mutilation and gender-based violence—all work to having adverse effects on Ethiopian women. These horrific practices mainly happen during adolescence and young womanhood.”*

### **Access to economic resources**

Women experience high rates of unemployment (50 percent), seasonal employment (37 percent), and temporary employment (13 percent). *“Women are also less likely than men to be paid for their work: over half of all women engage in the agricultural sector, for example, they receive no payment. Similar trends existed in other industries like small-scale manufacturing, where most female workers are unpaid family workers as compared to their male counterparts.”* This is a recipe for AGYW to drop out from school at primary levels especially in the rural areas of the country.

### **Empowerment opportunities**

AGYW face discrimination from young age to adulthood. This creates a vicious cycle that limits their opportunities to education and eventually empowerment. This is because patriarchy still reigns supreme and is visible from the family level to national structures. This obviously affects and limits women’s opportunities to access to education, knowledge of health and nutrition as well as awareness of their rights as human beings.

### **Recommendation**

The report highlights the following to its government;

- *Access to education and information are crucial in creating a better generation of AGYW in Ethiopia.*

### **3.1.2. BREAK-AWAY SESSIONS FOR EAST AFRICA**

Participants from all countries came together to discuss challenges faced by the presenting countries. The following are the discussion outputs;

#### **a. KENYA GROUP**

The group highlighted that there is a lot of FGM which affects young girls. This cuts across most of the region with “some communities using the reproductive parts removed from girls for ritual purposes.” They also highlighted teenage pregnancies as very prevalent. Some young girls resorted to having relationships due to abuses which they faced in their families during the Covid-19 induced lock down, where parents would at times fight in the presence of the children.

#### **b. UGANDA GROUP**

Although issues under discussion were on Uganda, discussion participants highlighted high rates of FGM cases in Kenya and Nigeria which cause insecurity on young girls. The group further highlighted challenges faced by young women to enter decision making spaces which results in them failing to have a voice on issues affecting them.

GBV issues were also raised by the group especially where parties are in an intimate relationship and this is triggered by culture where men feel they are in control, and sadly believe that “they own their partners.” They also bemoaned their communities’ belief system that “culturally views women as commodities resulting in low uptake by women of decision-making positions.”

#### **c. RWANDA GROUP**

According to this group, issues affecting girls know no regional demarcations. It was noted that even though most countries such as Rwanda had come up with free education policies, girls who became pregnant while at school have failed to return to school because of child caring roles. An example of Tanzania was cited where 60% of girls who become pregnant failed to go back to school because of what they termed the ‘Magufuli policy’ that is known worldwide as the most retrogressive. This policy was put in place by the late President which did not allow pregnant girls back into the mainstream education.

Participants further raised the concern that young girls have failed to progress in life due to limited policy and practice support. There are no follow ups on girls who drop out and

no deliberate policy to ensure there is progression after school. “When men are in charge, they close out women and girls.”

The group further highlighted that there is a lack of information dissemination on economic and social opportunities. This is sadly exacerbated by the fact that women have less access to media especially those women in the rural areas due to limited internet accessibility, lack of resources eg data and smart phones.



## 3.2. SOUTHERN AFRICA IN COUNTRY REPORTS

### 3.2.1. IN COUNTRY REPORTS

#### a. ZIMBABWE–Presented by Economic Justice for Women Project

##### **Key Highlights**

Young women and girls are not given opportunities.  
They are usually found at the periphery of development.  
Zimbabwe has policies, which speak to the rights of AGYW. It is also a signatory to a wide range of regional and international instruments which speaks to the rights of AGYW.

##### **Key recommendations**

A platform should be created where AGYW can set a collective agendas across the region, self-organize and pursue advocacy and campaigns for the future.

The girls highlighted that the largest part of the population is under 25 years of age. Challenges faced by AGYW included;

- *High rate of school dropouts.*
- *Education, health, public transport and water and sanitation facilities have deteriorated.*
- *Young women and girls are not given opportunities to participate in decision making. They are usually found at the periphery of development.*

Even though Zimbabwe has policies which speak to the rights of AGYW, these are not translated into practice. It is also a signatory to a wide range of regional and international instruments which speak to the rights of AGYW. However, the problem lies in the implementation and enforcement of the same. “Whilst the national constitution captured concerns of AGYW, there was however lack of political will to implement it.”

#### **Economic Issues**

Zimbabwe is still on a downward trajectory insofar as the economy is concerned and this was affecting mostly AGYW. There was largely an informal economy where many women and girls participated and with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, this reduced the number of women from participating in the economy. Even the formal economy had dwindled, and “many AGYW had lost their jobs due to the continued lockdowns. Many companies had downsized and the most hit were AGYW.”

## **Leadership Participation**

It was indicated that generally women do not have a voice and the primary reason is that they do not hold positions of authority. *“There are not many young women among those women in power and those who are there are not willing to relinquish power as they continue to hold on at the expense of the young.”* Zimbabwe has a quota system in the Zimbabwean constitution and some of the provisions that relate to this are falling away.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) face serious challenges relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and they are vulnerable to HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended and unsafe pregnancy. *“Various causes including poverty have also pushed AGYW into forced marriages, sex work where their negotiation power for safe sex is compromised due to the power dynamics entrenched by patriarchy and this has made them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases.”* It is sad that rape cases are on the increase in Zimbabwe which makes it easy for girls especially, to be affected by HIV/AIDS.

## **Human Rights**

Observance of human rights makes it easier for governments to observe AGYW’s rights. It has sadly been noted that there is a high disregard of human rights as violations are on the increase and the government that is expected to protect these rights has not been doing enough. The violations pose a threat to the girl child especially where socio-economic rights are concerned.

As a result of Covid 19 the government put in place restrictions on travel, education and livelihood support. These Covid-19 restrictions disadvantage women the most since justice could not be accessed and those whose rights were violated could not seek legal recourse and adequate support services to assist them.

Furthermore, women especially the young who participate in politics Zimbabwe continued to see their rights being violated during Covid 19. Cases of child labour also went up due to the increased poverty and desperation by families for livelihood support.

The culture in most communities increase AGYW rights violations. In numerous parts of Zimbabwe, *“girls are still being used as sacrifices to appease murder crimes committed in their families.”*

## **GBV and Covid 19**

The advent of covid-19 saw an increase in gender based violence cases as many survivors were locked down and were forced to face their perpetrators most of the time. Lack of social amenities such as water exacerbated GBV cases. This was seen mostly in high density and peri-urban areas communities. Women were the ones forced to spend most of their time fetching water. The same went for public transport which was scarce and where it was readily available, it was too expensive. Young girls remained vulnerable to assault, robbery and rape during the lockdown periods. With increased movement restrictions in the face of deep poverty, young women resorted to illegal movements using risky route in order to etch a living. Law enforcement agents such as soldiers and the police would take advantage of such situations by demanding sex from AGYW after catching them on the wrong side of the Covid 19 regulations.

## **SRHR**

Due to limited access to family planning challenges women fell pregnant during Covid 19. *“Genital mutilation and virginity testing are still a threat to AGYW in locations such as Gokwe, in Midlands where they are still being practised.”* AGYW continue to suffer from the reduced SRHR services during the Covid-19 crisis spanning from inaccessible family planning services, counselling services and youth friendly SRHR services. The Covid-19 crisis has also put a huge mental toll on young people. *“It resulted in anxiety, fear, uncertainty and loss resulting in mental health deteriorations. This unfortunately pushed many into drug abuse, irresponsible sexual activities and suicidal tendencies among AGYW.”*

## **ICT**

With the advent of Covid-19 there was a sudden use of ICTs for purposes of schooling and in some instances work. *“Young women and girls are the most affected since gadgets and data were a challenge. Therefore, many girls dropped out of school and in the process widened the social inequality gaps between the rich and the poor but also between men and women.”* Other negatives which were brought about by the use of ICTs included *“cyber bullying targeting AGYW.”*

## **Climate and environment**

Climate change has affected the country in the form of droughts and cyclones. Effects of these “climate crises mostly hit the poor and vulnerable who are ordinarily without adequate means to respond. These have brought homelessness, destruction of homes, education, health and transport infrastructure and human deaths.” AGYW suffer the most

when families are forced into rescue camps when they are prone to abuse and harassment. Usually when poverty strikes, families sacrifice the girl-child in marriage increasing forced marriages and child marriages. Climate disasters also destroyed means of livelihoods resulting in famine. *“Often AGYW are the ones who are sadly sacrificed by families since they are forced out of school and hardly access support services.”*

### **Recommendations to duty bearers by Zimbabwe AGYW**

AGYW of Zimbabwe felt that more could be done, especially by government to help them during crises periods. They also felt that their voices were not heard enough and called on duty bearers to implement the following;

- 1. Girls, especially, need to be capacitated to voice out their concerns. This will help them say out issues affecting them.*
- 2. A platform for AGYW should be created where AGYW can discuss issues affecting them and come up with recommendations to leaders such as governments on improving their situations.*
- 3. Girls know the issues that affect them and if given a platform, they can come up with advocacy campaigns to change their situations for the better.*
- 4. There is need for AGYW to be given opportunities to engage all those who can make a positive change in their lives. This will help increase awareness on the problems AGYW face and shape future interventions and policies for the benefit of AGYW.*

In conclusion, the Zimbabwe representative, whilst acknowledging the great strides made by the government to provide for equal opportunities politically and economically, called on the government to be mindful of the challenges that are presented by the uneven playing field to benefit AGYW. The reality is that there is still a lot to be done in terms of full implementation of these positive policies. *“AGYW still remain on the margins in the economy, on social services access and on taking political power and positions. The conference is a platform of hope for the AGYW to reclaim their power and begin to feed into all key conversations at all levels towards their inclusion and strategic redress of all their key issues.”*

## b. MALAWI- Presented by Youth Inspire Initiative

### **Key Highlights**

*There was also an increase in the number of teen marriages and pregnancies directly caused by Covid 19.*

Implementation of the strategies and laws is poor

### **Key recommendations**

*There is an opportunity to continue raising the challenges that AGYW face so that government leaders make policies that work for them*

## **Economic challenges**

- *The major economic activity is farming.*
- *Men are the farmers while women are confined to domestic work.*
- *Adolescent girls and young women have no access to loans to start businesses since they have no collateral.*
- *Some women are forced by circumstances to sleep with men for economic favors. There is a chance to say no to that abuse but it becomes difficult to get employed later on. So they are forced to give in to demands of their superiors. This has the effect of exposing them to diseases.*
- *Statistically, one in every three women in Malawi has experienced physical sexual violence before attaining the age of eighteen. 25 percent of young women are illiterate and 1 in 3 adolescents have started bearing children. A few young women and girls know how to protect themselves against sexual infections.*
- *A large number of AGYW women work in farms and this reduces their chances of being well known. Due to Covid-19, the challenges stated above have become worse.*
- *There was also an increase in the number of teen marriages and pregnancies directly caused by Covid 19.*

## **Education**

In Malawi teenage pregnancy is rampant. It was reported that 1 in 3 adolescent girls have started bearing children, which is a danger to their health. As a result, most of these young women and girls failed to proceed with their education. It was reported that information on sexuality is not adequately shared even though 1 in 5 of women have an understanding of SRHR issues and how they affect their lives. *“Usually, AGYW especially those in*

*remote areas are left out. A few young women and girls know how to protect themselves against sexual infections.*” It was further reported that 1 – 3 girls aged 18 who have passed through university have been empowered of their right to contraceptives.

Malawi has the best laws and strategies on adolescent girls and young women to be admitted in schools. However, *“implementation of the strategies and laws is poor.”* And *“Government is reluctant or unable to enforce such laws.”*

The daughter-in-law of the Malawian President briefly attended the conference and had the following to say;

*“I am a living testimony of what education of a young woman can do. She encouraged girls to be strong and resolute in their mission. She pointed out that 'A baby who does not cry will not be fed' She was pointing out that if AGYW remain silent, their concerns will not be heard. Being a daughter in law of the Sitting SADC chairperson, the concerns of the girls will quickly get to the Chairperson of SADC.”*

She also stated that she sat in the Board of the Malawian First Lady Foundation. In Malawi for instance, it has some of the best laws and policies in so far as the legal framework is concerned. *“However how these are implemented is problematic. This leads to poor enforcement of these laws and policies. In the same vein, no one is accountable in this regard.”*

## **Recommendations**

- *There is an opportunity to continue raising the challenges that AGYW face so that government leaders make policies that work for them.*
- *Education is key in ensuring that become empowered and assume positions of power in the society so more resources are needed towards educating the girl child.*
- *Law enforcement officers should make sure that perpetrators of abuse are arrested and prosecuted so that girls remain in school and become who they should be. Girls need to grow up in a safe environment.*

c. **SOUTH AFRICA**—Presented by Ms Sidumisile Msimanga.

**Key highlights**

Make GBV a national emergency’ as a call by YW  
An example from South Africa was cited where women aged 35 years are deemed old and unemployable

**Key Recommendation**

There is need to create space for young women to be in leadership positions. They are hindered by gender and cultural barriers, among other things. Young women are being asked to exchange powerful positions for bribes or sex by man in powerful positions-Sidumisile

**Education**

Laws and policies for including AGYW in education are in place but what remains to be done is to hold those responsible for implementation of the same accountable. *“Education transforms lives and creates spaces for economic participation. To achieve the inclusion of AGYW in education the government has introduced bursaries and study aid platforms were introduced for young women”*. Economic challenges which are closely linked to employment is unemployment among the youth especially among the young women. Employers view young women as a risk since they still want to bear children and take care of them.

There was need to create space for young women to be in leadership positions. *“They are hindered by gender and cultural barriers among other things. Young women are being asked to exchange powerful positions for bribes or sex by men in powerful positions.”*

**ICT**

In 2020, women occupied 23 percent of ICT jobs in South Africa. This was because female students were not encouraged to take STEM courses in high school.

**GBV**

South Africa is notorious for GBV and femicide. This increased during Covid 19 lockdown. Policies against GBV were available but not being implemented, *“therefore the impact of these policies was not visible.”*

Organisations are currently creating community dialogue events to bridge the gap. The current status quo shows that a large number of young women are affected mentally due

to violence. The government has ensured that YW have access to social support. It's now a matter of monitoring whether it is really working.

## **Leadership**

Not many women are in leadership positions, and this disadvantages them. *“Women should be given space to take such responsible positions so that they advocate for themselves and not wait for men to advocate for women. Young women for instance should be empowered in all aspects of life.”*

There is also the aspect of social and cultural stereotypes. The whole of Southern African suffered patriarchal attitudes, and this usually disadvantage women and girls. For as long this remains, women and girls will continue to be disadvantaged.

In so far as politics and political platforms are concerned, *“women are always disadvantaged. In some instances, men demand sexual favours in order for them to support women. This is unfair treatment and for as long as it continues, women will always rely on men to take up political offices.”*

## **Recommendations**

It was recommended that;

- *There is need to create space for young women to be in leadership positions. They are hindered by gender and cultural barriers, among other things.*
- *Young women are being asked to exchange powerful positions for bribes or sex by man in powerful positions. This has to be stopped.*
- *Government needs to involve AGYW in decision making.*



#### d. **ESWATINI-Presented by One Billion Rising Solidarity**

##### **Key Highlights**

Gender inequality is very high and this aspect is better shown in parliament where women are poorly represented.

*“GBV is also on the increase and this has been compounded by the COVID 19 pandemic*

##### **Key recommendations**

*Gender Based violence must be declared as a national emergency and government must come up with strategies that are well funded in order to push back this scourge.*

In Eswatini the youth constitute the majority as far as the population is concerned. Eswatini is classified as a lower middle-income country. However, there is high levels of income inequality. *“Gender inequality is very high and this aspect is better shown in parliament where women are poorly represented. Currently there are only 2 elected female MPs out of a total of 55 elected members of Parliament. In total there are 82 MPs”*. There is high rate of poverty and unemployment and women and youth are the most affected. Because of this poverty, majority of citizens depend of food handouts (food aid). *“This therefore means that women and youth cannot contribute to positive change in the socio-economic, cultural and political landscape of the country. This has caused, in recent times partly contributed to the serious political unrest which is prevailing in the country.”* This has contributed to the crumbling economy, health and education crisis, high level of poverty, high unemployment rate, and increase in gender-based violence cases among other challenges.

#### **GBV, SRH, HIV, Covid-19**

*“GBV is also on the increase and this has been compounded by the COVID 19 pandemic.”* Statistically it is said that with approximately 1 in 3 females having experienced some form of sexual abuse by age 18 years, and 48 per cent of women reporting to have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. *“Youths lack the necessary knowledge insofar decision making is concerned especially in matters of sexual and reproductive rights and this has compromised them and hence they are usually coerced into engaging in actions that are not in their best interest. This causes unwanted pregnancies and STIs.”* Contraceptive use among adolescents is very low and this include condom use. Notwithstanding readily available reproductive health services being provided in most health institutions, there is low uptake by this group of population. However, there is not much adolescent youth-friendly health services and integrated family planning services provided in most of these institutions. HIV and AIDS services

are better provided. “Girls and young women are the most affected since prevalence rate is high amongst this group of citizens.”

*“When COVID-19 hit the country gains made in the HIV and AIDs, this was eroded. In 2020 when the strict lockdown was introduced this disturbed the critical HIV prevention sessions for adolescent girls and young women and this also extended to limited access to medication. This also extended to the closure of schools and the lockdowns made it difficult to access sexual and reproductive health services, including contraceptives, resulting in high rates of teenage pregnancy.”*

*Poverty was also compounded and this exacerbated young women and girls’ vulnerability and men started to take advantage of the situation by taking advantage of AGYW sexually and GBV also increased.*

### **Human Rights and current political unrest**

*“As indicated in Eswatini there is political unrest.”* Human rights violations are on the increase especially by those in power and those linked to government, royalty, traditional authorities and prominent business persons. *“Courts, seemingly, are compromised. One instance is where a young university student was raped by a prince. In as much as the matter was reported to the police, the said case died a natural death since it was never taken to court for prosecution.”* The National Human Rights Commission has recently begun to make statements against some human rights abuses. Women rights as are provided for in the constitution are being disregarded. Other Human Rights violations that are prevalent include;

- *lack of support by parents,*
- *forced marriages,*
- *denial of access to land,*
- *unemployment,*
- *denial of equal access to education,*
- *lack of access to health care services and*
- *Limited business opportunities.”*

### **Recommendations made included the following:**

- i. *There is need for the creation of a safe environment in the form of relevant and coherent legislations and policies that will integrate sexual reproductive health services for youth. This should be done by Parliament.*
- ii. *There is also need for the adoption of a right-based approach to sexual and reproductive health to feed into policy-making and improvement of services. Again government should be in charge.*
- iii. *SRH programs that respond to challenges by girls and young women are a priority and should be enabled by government.*
- iv. *SRH rights and products should be accessible and affordable to all the youths including those living with different forms of disabilities. Government should make this realisable.*
- v. *Interventions that are ethical, sensitive to age and gender, which deal with harmful cultural barriers should be encouraged by community and national leaders.*
- vi. *The dissemination of accurate information and counselling on SRH, including evidence-based, comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education (CSRE) should be prioritized by development partners.*
- vii. *Gender Based violence must be declared as a national emergency and government must come up with strategies that are well funded in order to push back this scourge.*
- viii. *An all-inclusive political dialogue should be encouraged in order for the current crisis to be addressed and women both young and elderly should be included by the government.*
- ix. *More young women must be trained on conflict resolution and mediation in Eswatini by government and NGOs.*
- x. *Psychosocial support for children who have lost parents to GBV, the Covid 19 pandemic and political unrest should be provided by independent bodies.*
- xi. *Psychosocial support for the victims of political unrest should also be provided.*

### **3.2.2. SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGION – BREAK AWAY REPORTING**

After some presentations from countries in southern Africa region, all participants including those from the western and eastern regions were put in groups to further analyse and interrogate thorny issues affecting AGYW. The following is the feedback from group discussions.

#### **a. MALAWI GROUP- By Kimberly**

The group focused on disability and access to resources on girls and with disabilities. They reported that in Liberia most girls with disability are prone to abuse and are discriminated against even though they believe that disability is not inability. They highlighted that these girls are in need of counselling services for what they came across. Tanaka from South Africa submitted that *“girls with disabilities needed education even though the community judged them negatively.”*

Fari from Zimbabwe highlighted that *“girls with disabilities are faced with infrastructure challenges where most buildings do not have ramps. The said infrastructure is not disability friendly.”* She said there is also a challenge on sign language and there was need to have it as a mandatory especially in learning institutions. She stated that *“there is need for a solution to be put in place which will make infrastructure conducive for every person with disability.”* The group also recommended that data base for persons with disabilities should be put in place so that it is easy to determine the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The group further recommended that *“the government should make funds available and one of the easiest ways of making available funds is through partnering with other stakeholders such as UNICEF for the protection of girls with disabilities.”*

#### **b. SOUTH AFRICA GROUP –By Sidumisile**

The group focused on the impact of COVID 19 on young girls. The group reported that most women and girls lost their source of income since they were mainly engaged in the informal sector. The lock down regulations *“took that away from them and they engaged in unpaid care work.”*

In South Africa, most people survive on formal jobs and not subsistence farming and therefore the lock down had an impact on young women who ended up losing their jobs.

Food insecurity affected AGYW especially *“those on ARVs since they could not take their medication without having food.”* During the COVID period, there were institutions which distributed food. However, *“some men started taking advantage of their positions*

*in distributing food and started demanding sex in exchange for food. There was a lot of corruption in the distribution and some girls even fell pregnant because of this.”*

*Young school going girls’ access to education was affected. “Some could not afford on-line lessons due to various circumstances such as lack of data, internet and gadgets. Some girls ended up dropping out of school and became care givers.”*

*During the COVID- 19 era, a number of institutions were not fully operational and some even closed and this affected survivors of GBV who could not access much needed services. Institutions such as “the police were deployed on road blocks leaving the stations unattended, clinics were giving priority to COVID patients at the expense of other patients including those sexually abused. This was made worse by that contraceptive services were not a priority and as result there was high prevalence of pregnancy cases.”*

*Termination of pregnancy was another challenge since a number of countries save for South Africa, do not have provisions for the termination of pregnancies legally. “Many young girls therefore ended up using back yard service providers to terminate their pregnancies which claimed lives of many since many of these are not trained to do such procedures.”*

### **c. ESWATINI GROUP- By Fari**

*The group focused on challenges of COVID -19 on accessing online lessons. The group reported that “some girls in the country as well as other Southern African Countries such as Zimbabwe could not access on-line lessons because of resources and materials attached to the activity which are very expensive and in some instances are not readily available.”*

*The group reported that in Eswatini there is an inequality gap in the economic sector, “few women are reported to be working and they need to be empowered in order for them to develop.”*

*Eswatini has a culture called “imhlanga/intwala which discriminates against women and girls. Because of this cultural practice, young girls have been abused and, in some instances, abducted.”*

*The group further highlighted that “AGYW needed to position themselves in positions of decision making so that they can contribute to their agenda, since their participation is a challenge in most African countries. Young women should be involved in all such processes especially where decisions involve them.”*

**d. ZIMBABWE GROUP – By Tanaka**

The group's main focus was on challenges that young women face due to harmful cultural practices. These include sexual abuse and child marriages. The group interrogated this issue by answering a question on "*why young girls do not open up when faced with such abuse.*"

The group agreed that unfair justice systems contribute to not reporting, where police usually do not follow up cases. In some cases, "*those who are supposed to protect victims end up abusing them.*" It was mentioned that during COVID -19 "*those who were manning roadblocks would abuse young girls in order for them to get right of passage.*"

Culture was another hindrance which was raised. "*Young girls could not take leadership positions since they are perceived as not capable. Those who try to take such positions especially in politics are viewed as prostitutes.*"

Poverty was also raised as a reason for not reporting such abuses. "*Some young girls sacrificed their rights in order to get what they call a better life when they engage in affairs.*" Some could not afford to buy sanitary ware and therefore encouraged each other to learn how to make their own pads.

### 3.3. WEST AFRICA REGION

#### 3.3.1. COUNTRY POSITIONS

##### *a. SIERRA LEONE*

###### **Key Highlight**

Sierra Leonean girls and young women face several problems regarding various forms of sexual Gender Based Violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, rape of adults and minors, marital rape, and school-related sexual abuse, as well as supposedly harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and an unending civil strife.

###### **Key recommendation**

There is need to increase participation by AGYW in science and technology as well as access to finance.

*“Sierra Leone which used to be one of the most peaceful places on earth has suffered its own share of many troubling occurrences.”* These occurrences range from natural disasters like mud slides, floods to disease outbreaks like the 2014 Ebola Virus and the 2019 Corona virus pandemics. *“It has also suffered tremendous losses in lives and human resources in an eleven years of brutal civil war, hence the outcomes and repercussions have been devastating for the greater portion of its less than ten million population over the last couple of years.”*

The consequences of the war, natural disasters and disease outbreaks has affected the whole population economically, socially and psychologically till to date but the adolescent girls and young women are the most affected and they remain at risk. The issues include but not limited to the following;

##### **i. Sexually related gender based violence**

Sierra Leonean AGYW face several problems regarding *“various forms of sexual Gender Based Violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, rape of adults and minors, marital rape, and school-related sexual abuse, as well as supposedly harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.”* In the last year alone, Sierra Leone saw a rampant rise in rape of girls and even children younger than a year old, domestic violence, sexual penetration and marital violence and it continued to rise by the day. Although a lot has been done by lots of organisations and the government like the introduction of the ***“Hands Off Our Girls Campaign,”*** the sexual offences courts and many other initiatives, more girls and young women are still suffering in silence and something needs to be done as a matter of urgency.

## **ii. Education;**

The President of the Republic Of Sierra Leone introduced the Free Quality Education in Sierra Leone a few years back.

*“One would expect that most girls would now be in school and learning. However, the truth remains that very few girls benefitted from this policy, and even the few that are benefitting from it have been facing the extreme high costs that come with it. Admissions which are supposed to be free and non-discriminatory are now a lot more expensive than it was before because of corruption and the costs of learning materials. Girls and young women are now paying millions of Leones for admission and extra charges although they're not literally paying fees. As a result of the high cost it comes with, most of the girls that were admitted because they thought education was free have dropped out of these schools and engaged in something else.”*

Major causes of the inaccessibility of quality education for girls in Sierra Leone are lack of funds, expensive higher education, neglect by parents and inaccessibility of quality schools for girls in the rural settings.

## **iii. Female Genital Mutilation**

Female genital mutilation is a customary and traditional practice which is classified as a harmful cultural practice due to its effects on AGYW. It has been criticized by many local and international organizations because it exposes AGYW to severe bleeding, urinal problems and later cyst infections, as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of death. It is commonly referred to as "**Bondo**" and it is still being practised in most parts of the country and *“thousands of girls are still suffering in silence.”* A wide range of campaigns have been conducted to create awareness of the ills associated with FGM but despite all the campaigns and advocacy, the practice continues.

## **iv. Pandemics**

The Ebola virus of 2014 and the Covid 19 worsened the situation of young women and girls in every part of Sierra Leone. During the Ebola crisis, young women and in some cases girls who worked as primary caregivers for the siblings or family members, were at an increased risk of contracting the virus. Although these risks were known, no special measures were taken to protect them. *“In the initial stages of both the Ebola and Covid 19 outbreaks, there were no special outreach programs initiated, nor any communication efforts made towards the girls and young women in positions of risk to make them aware of their situations.”*



#### **v. Issues related to HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS has become one of the fastest growing health concern in Sierra Leone. AGYW are the most affected. This is so because of the high rate of prostitution and indiscriminate sexual activities common amongst them. And as the infection rate continues to rise as many young girls and young women are facing health challenges with little or no facilities for treatment.

#### **vi. Issues related to access to finance**

The economic situation in Sierra Leone remains one of the worst in Western Africa and it brings with it unimaginable social consequences for all but particularly for the adolescent girls and young women. *“AGYW have no access to finance to support their empowerment projects. Most government and private finance institutions view them as high risk borrowers and reserve loans mainly for men.”* Young women are generally discriminated against and seen as people who are not worthy enough to handle managerial positions. As a result, women and girls have no economic freedom. They largely depend on their male counterparts or spouses for their economic support and livelihood. *“Although loans in the form of seed monies and grants are available, only few girls and young women have access to it.”*

#### **vii. Leadership and political participation**

It is considered a tradition in African societies that men are viewed as a stronger sex, and the breadwinners. They are therefore the heads of families and the women on the other hand are the subordinates and are supposed to be at the call of their male counterparts. In leadership and politics, this is also the norm. Most of the seats in the house of the Sierra Leone parliament are occupied by men. The heads of government, businesses and parastatals and ministries are mostly men. Thus, women are given limited access to meaningful participation in making crucial decisions and contesting for leadership positions in Sierra Leone. Although a Bill on Gender Empowerment has been tabled before parliament waiting to be passed into law, the majority of girls and young women have limited access to leadership positions and political participation.

#### **viii. Issues related to psychological and social support**

Young girls and women in Sierra Leone go through a lot of psychological and mental health challenges each year. The reasons for these problems ranges from many factors including poverty, rape, sexual Gender Based Violence, marginalisation and social

segregation. And with all these psychological challenges, there are limited resources and infrastructure to provide the much needed psychological and social support.

In cases where the government and international organizations have stepped in, little differences have been made, hence the problems continue to affect many AGYW.

### **ix. Issues related to peace building**

Since prehistoric times, maintaining the peace and security of empires and nation states have been the exclusive job of the men who seems to be, and regarded as the stronger sex. Thus, women have been segregated from participating in peace building.

In Sierra Leone like most other African nations, very few women are given access to peace building and this mainly because they are seen as not violent or strong enough to do the "masculine work". Very little has ever been done to enable girls and young women to take the lead in peace building although they are the ones that suffers most in case of an armed conflict. They are disproportionately affected by loss of their loved ones especially husbands in battle and young children due to hunger and disease. They also play the role of caregivers for families.

### **x. Issues related to climate change**

Across societies, the issues of climate change affect men and women differently as gender inequalities persist around the world affecting the abilities of individual to adapt. For instance women and girls in Sierra Leone are often responsible for gathering and producing food, collecting water and fire wood in rural communities. But with the recent changes in climatic conditions, these tasks are becoming more and more difficult. There are poor harvests and that means more work for women and girls in rural communities since they are duty bound to ensure food security for their families. As a result of climate change, girls are under more pressure to help grow enough crops and fetch fuel, hence their chances of concentrating on their education are severely reduced. However, there is untapped knowledge in adapting to climate change. The government and other organisations need to pool resources and harness expertise and tackle the problem.

### **xi. ICT**

ICT and discipline such as engineering are traditionally viewed as a man's field in Sierra Leone. Many girls are reluctant to participate in mathematics and the science subjects in high school, thereby giving their male counterparts an upper hand in institutions of higher learning. As a result, the ICT sector remains largely dominated by the men. The

government being aware of this, has been encouraging girls with scholarships and discounts in the sciences but yet, they are not properly motivated. Very few are benefitting from the tremendous potentials offered by the Information Communication Technology sector in Sierra Leone.

## **b. GHANA- Associates for Change**

### **Key Highlight**

Traditionally, girls take on the triple burden of home, family and community responsibilities including in farming and domestic labor such as catering for younger children and other domestic chores and thus are rarely afforded the option of returning to school.

### **Key recommendation**

As key stakeholders in the sector adolescent girls and young women are calling on the Ghana Government to ensure that there is special programming focused on ensuring girls in remote and deprived areas, including rural remote and inner cities are provided with the necessary support to stay in school and return to school.

## **Education**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global emergency affecting all countries and Ghana was not spared. To curb the internal spread of the virus, several countries instituted policies to ensure the closure of educational facilities. Ghana, just as the rest of the world, went into shutdown mode for months. This affected delivery of education. Since they were out of school, many young girls have been in constant and prolonged contact with potential abusers and a considerable number of them have been impregnated and sexually abused. *“Some have dropped out of school to engage in informal trade and those who were impregnated cannot return to school due to the need to care for the babies and also due to stigma associated with teen pregnancy. Furthermore, some parents are not willing to support the impregnated girls for them to return to school.”*

Traditionally, girls take on the triple burden of home, family and community responsibilities including in farming and domestic labor such as catering for younger children and other domestic chores and thus are rarely afforded the option of returning to school. The education of the girl child, especially those in rural and deprived areas, has been hard hit.

## **Covid-19**

The Covid-19 caused an increase in intra-household violence in Ghana. Prior to the pandemic 18.3% of children in households experienced physical punishment and abuse and this increased to 26.1% as at March 2020. Surveys conducted by UNICEF in the post pandemic era showed that in May 2020 19% of children between the ages of 15 and 19 suffered violence and abuse from home and due to lockdown. These were unable seek any form of support to deal with the abuse they were experiencing.

The breakdown of livelihood support and loss of income sources caused large numbers of young girls to resort to transactional sex as a means of survival. The harmful practice of

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has also increased in Ghana during the pandemic due to the lack of social support services.

### **Teenage pregnancy**

Child marriage and teenage pregnancy have also been on the rise and are at an all-time high in post pandemic Ghana. The Annual Ghana Health Service (GHS) and District Health Information Management System (DHIMS) 2020 data in Ghana showed a high incidence of teenage pregnancy across all regions.

*Statistics from this DHIMS study revealed that about 301 girls were impregnated every day in 2020 and for each hour 13 teenage pregnancies were recorded in the same year. In all, a total of 109,888 incidence of teenage pregnancy were recorded with the lowest teenage pregnant girl being 10 years. The highest numbers of teenage pregnancies were recorded in the Ashanti region with 17,802 closely followed by the Eastern, Central and Northern regions.*

### **Gender Based violence**

GBV has become a very common occurrence across several households in Ghana. Females are suffering higher exposure to physical abuse as compared to males. Prior to Covid-19 studies showed that younger girls between the ages 15 to 19 years are more likely to experience some form of domestic violence. *What makes it worse is that the government is now focused on other sectors on Covid 19 and GBV issues are now being neglected. Of course, the worst sufferer is the AGYW.* In mitigation, UNFPA Ghana held a number of online events targeted at adolescent girls to ensure continuous sharing of information on issues affecting AGYW.

### **Recommendations**

- *As key stakeholders in the sector adolescent girls and young women are calling on the Ghana Government to ensure that there is special programming focused on ensuring girls in remote and deprived areas, including rural remote and inner cities are provided with the necessary support to stay in school and return to school.*
- *Special counseling and community centers are needed urgently to provide social support services to assist girls who have been affected by abuse or violence under Covid 19.*

- *Ongoing programmes should also be set up to assist teenage mothers find and sustain income and livelihood programs.*

### **c. LIBERIA- Centre for Justice and Peace Studies**

#### **Key Highlight**

Adolescent girls and young women in Liberia want to acquire education but this is difficult to accomplish in a country where 80% of the population lives in abject poverty.

#### **Key recommendation**

The responsibility to change the situation for AGYW lies squarely on the shoulders of government. Policies and resources by government can help change AGYW situations.

### **Education**

Adolescent girls and young women in Liberia want to acquire education but this is difficult to accomplish in a country where 80% of the population lives in abject poverty. There is limited access to safe water in schools. There is also limited access to quality higher education for AGYW. There are very few of them who can afford to move to nearby countries to continue with their education. 74 000 of primary school going age groups do not complete primary education with girls being the most affected.

### **GBV**

Women are exposed to high rates of GBV. They are victims of FGM. Communities are affected by human trafficking, both internal and external trafficking. *Usually girls trafficked internally are used for selling wares in streets while their mates are in school. Those trafficked externally are usually made to engage in sex work for the benefit of their masters. In some cases they would never return home. There are also ritualistic killings which affect AGYW. Usually bodies of young women or girls are found in incomplete buildings. In some cases young women and girls are gang raped. Sexual harassment is rampant in educational institutions. In schools teachers take advantage of young girls and obtain sexual favors and in return they get good grades. Some university girls are forced by circumstances to have transactional sex with several professors to get money for fees. This has the effect of exposing them to diseases and unintended pregnancies.*

### **Leadership**

Women are oriented to believe that they are home makers and that they should always be at the back of development. *Tradition has it that men should lead in politics. This is reflected in parliament where seats are largely occupied by men. Adolescent girls and*

*young women are very shy to participate in developmental issues. They are largely not well educated to take up leadership positions in both political and business circles. It follows that influential positions are occupied by men and women are relegated to being assistants in offices resulting in them getting less paying jobs.*

It was also reported that they have limited access to land and other valuable properties and little to no access to bank loans. Financial institutions view them as risky borrowers.

### **Psychological and mental health issues**

*During the period under review, poverty and marginalisation increased due to the effects of Covid-19. People lost their jobs and they were restricted to their homes due to the lockdown which was imposed by the government. Men spent more time at home with little or nothing to do. Men are viewed as breadwinners and when they failed to provide for their families they were affected psychologically and they vented out their anger on their wives and children. Adolescent girls and young women were the most affected. They had nowhere to report the matters since movement was restricted.*

### **ICT**

ICT is important for every person's development. However, the Liberian community is largely patriarchal. There is a culture of believing that STEM subjects are a preserve for men and women confine themselves to social sciences. It follows that they are reduced to mere consumers of ICT products. Women are financially constrained and therefore lack full participation in issues to do with science and technology.

### **Climate change**

Most adolescent girls and young women are the most affected by climate change. Water sources and forests are dwindling and girls have to travel for long distances to fetch water and firewood for domestic use. Women also spent much of their time tilling the land to produce food for their families at the expense of attending school for their personal development. Due to reduced food production, their husbands seek employment in faraway places leaving them to look after the children alone. In some cases this increased the chances of infidelity and spreading of diseases between the parties.

### **Peace building**



It was reported that the role of peace building is placed on men. Women are seen as weak and incapable of participating in issues to do with peace building. This is so despite the fact that where there is no peace, it is them who suffer the most through loss of spouses, protecting the children against the effects of war and taking care of the injured.

### **Recommendation**

*The responsibility to change the situation for AGYW lies squarely on the shoulders of government. Policies and resources by government can help change AGYW situations.*

#### **d. NIGERIA- Society for the Improvement of Rural People**

##### **Key Highlights**

There was insecurity in schools due to the activities of Boko Haram. Young girls were being kidnapped from schools resulting in parents refusing to have their AGYW attending school.

##### **Key recommendation**

The government should do more to promote girls rights and gender equality.

#### **Education**

It was reported that during the period under review, Nigeria had a population of over 200million people and adolescent girls and young women formed a substantial number.

*AGYW are affected in areas of education at all levels. Girl child education is not given priority if compared to their male counterparts. Due to Covid 19, closure of schools for prolonged times affected AGYW severely. There was insecurity in schools due to the activities of Boko Haram. Young girls were being kidnapped from schools resulting in parents refusing to have their AGYW attending school. The government should do more to promote girls rights and gender equality.*

For PWDs, it is difficult for them to learn since they are not usually given special attention. There are no specialised facilities and infrastructure to cater for the needs of AGYW with disabilities. There is no access to sanitary wear and clean water in most schools making it difficult for AGYW to attend school when they are having their menstrual periods.

#### **GBV**

Due to Covid 19, cases of GBV increased. This impacts negatively on the community. Child marriages, domestic violence and rape were rampant. A large population of AGYW are married before the age of 18. AGYW are exposed to FGM. The rituals are performed in septic conditions and many girls lose their lives in the process. *PWDs are the most affected by GBV. They face discrimination due to their disabilities. They are neglected and maltreated. They are exposed to rape because they may not be able to identify the perpetrators. Some perpetrators molest AGYW with disabilities at night since they do not want to be seen by people. Some engage in sex with AGYW with disabilities for ritual purposes.*

Women are being bullied at market places and if they challenge it, more men join in the bullying. So they would rather choose to remain silent rather than challenge it. Due to Covid 19 lockdowns AGYW were denied access to justice due to restricted movement.

Delays by courts in dealing with GBV cases resulted in many people settling out of court. This had the effect of letting perpetrators go unpunished in some cases.

## **Leadership**

Largely, it is men who occupy influential positions both in politics and business. In politics women are denied access. Meetings are usually held in the middle of the night when young women are expected to be at home with their husbands and children. The women who dare participate are labelled as prostitutes. Communities hold patriarchal views that women cannot lead men. Fees for campaigning are extremely high and are usually beyond the reach of AGYW. *The activities by Boko Haram have the effect of barring women from fully participating in politics.*

## **Economic, social and cultural aspects**

Covid 19 has resulted in AGYW losing their means of survival. They were confined to their homes and could not sell wares at the market. This resulted in increased poverty among the AGYW. They started to rely heavily on their male counterparts for survival and since most men lost their jobs, they became abusive towards AGYW. The abused AGYW resorted to substance abuse. They became more sexually active and became more involved with multiple partners. It was difficult for AGYW to access facilities for contraceptives resulting in unintended pregnancies. Mensural hygiene was difficult to maintain for AGYW in schools. Most girls had to skip school during menstruation.

## **Recommendations**

- *Nigeria has vast mineral resources whose proceeds should be channeled towards the welfare of AGYW.*
- *The government should do more to promote AGYW protection and gender equality.*

### **3.3.2. WEST AFRICA BREAK AWAY GROUP REPORTING**

#### **a. GHANA GROUP**

The group was focusing on factors that affect girls and young women in their development, factors such peer pressure, child marriages, gender based violence, culture and others. The group reported that *in other parts of the region parents neglect their children by allowing child marriages to happen. Some girls enter into early marriages because of peer presser, and this happened pretty much during COVID 19 era.*

Sexual abuse and rape are challenges also faced by young girls in Africa. Such abuse is perpetrated by partners and in some cases relatives which reside with the survivor.

The group recommended that *AGYW needed social support especially those succumbed to rape and other forms of violence.* In Ghana the government in its bid to protect and prevent young women and girls provides free education and counselling. There is also a paralegal programme, where paralegals empower girls on gender based violence and encourage them to report such abuses.

#### **b. NIGERIA GROUP**

The group was focusing on issues which affect girls and women with disabilities and issues around low self-esteem. Issues discussed were on economic discrimination, ICT and gender based violence. The group reported that young girls faced challenges when it came to sanitary pads which had become exorbitantly priced and girls could not afford them. The group recommended that the government should consider such issues as a priority when budgeting.

The group reported discrimination against girls with disabilities. *Girls and women with disabilities are not able to get employment, cannot access health and legal services and that they are used for ritual purposes. The issue of infrastructure where most buildings are not conducive for a person with disability. This has made girls with disabilities fail to access essential services.*

The group went on to discuss issues to do with ICT, where they said the society tended to believe that technology is not for girls but for boys. Because of this belief *most girls cannot access social media. Some do not because of poverty and inaccessibility of gadgets and resources. Girls in remote areas are the most affected. Lack of capacity and accessibility resulted in most girls failing to participant during online lessons.* The group recommended that *girls should be given the opportunity and should be capacitated to use technology so that they build their confidence and self-esteem.*

**c. SIERRA LEONE GROUP**

The group reported teenage pregnancy as a challenge for young women and girls. The group recommended *the introduction of family planning and contraceptive services to young women and girls*. They also recommended that *girls of 10 years and above be empowered on sex education*.

On issues related to GBV the group recommended partnering with the perpetrators as well as men counterparts so as to end gender based violence.

**d. LIBERIA GROUP**

Farai Murangwa from Zimbabwe reported on behalf of the group *that women do not get financial assistance from the government as men do, this has placed young women and girls in a vulnerable position and exposing them to rape and other abuses*.

Child marriages was reported to have increased on girls where they are forced into marriages. It was reported that *some parents are actually supporting child marriages due to poverty and lack of education hence increase in HIV and AIDs rate, STIs, divorce and deaths because of early marriages*.

The group came up with the following recommendations to the above issues:-

- *Removal of rape survivors from the perpetrators*
- *Creation of jobs and life skills for young women and girls*
- *Education of the community especially boys that rape can also happen to their sisters*
- *Advocacy on just and fair laws*
- *Dialogue with traditional leaders and government on harmful cultural practices*
- *Education of young women and girls on their rights*

## 4. PRESENTATIONS ON EVIDENCE BUILDING, ADVOCACY AND COMMUNIQUE DEVELOPMENT

### 4.1. Evidence building

Ms Nyaradzo Mashayamombe hosted a panel discussion on evidence building for effective advocacy. The table below shows the names and positions of the panelists;

| PANELIST                  | ORGANISATION   |
|---------------------------|--|
| Dr. Leslie Casely-Hayford | Associates for Change, Director                                  |
| Dr. Mat Lowe              | Society for the Study of Women's Health (SSWH), Founder/Director |
| Dr. Caroline Kabiru       | African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)            |
| Dr. Fatoumata Ouattara    | Institute of Research for Development (IRD), Researcher          |

The discussion highlighted the following;

- a. The need for empirical evidence to make a case for change
- b. The need to be involved and see the necessity of evidence and data gathering for effective advocacy
- c. Why it is important not to fear research but to see this as an effective tool to support one's case
- d. How AGYW can effectively make use of existing synergies to gather data and build a stronger case for change.

### 4.2. Advocacy at local, national, regional and international levels

The objective of the presentation was to debunk myths about advocacy and offering what it really is and how it helps;

- *Advocacy is only for professional lobbyists:* advocacy is a public activity while lobbying requires “behind-the-scene” activities in its very essence.
- *Advocacy is walking down the street with a bull horn or advocacy is rioting in a demonstration or protest rally:* This myth mixes different concepts; rallies are activism, which are sometimes useful, but it's not always effective advocacy.

- *Advocacy is the same as fundraising or donating to charity:* Again, as we said above, advocacy is all about initiating social change, which definitely cannot be achieved through just collecting funds. Social change is often achieved with little or almost no funds.
- *Advocacy consumes a lot of time; I'm too busy to get involved in advocacy:* Advocacy doesn't have to be complicated and time-consuming – a properly planned and organized campaign requires small actions from many people rather than big ones from a few.
- *Advocacy is all about "politics" (in a negative connotation):* Advocacy can be political (i.e. lobbying for a specific piece of legislation), but is more often social and intellectual focused on speaking out on behalf of those without a voice.

### **4.3. Developing the communique**

To start off with, participants were equipped on what a communique was and how to develop one.

A definition of s communique was discussed and some important points to consider shared as follows;

- It is important to acknowledge that in drafting a communiqué wording will influence its acceptance.
- The draft communiqué should be clear and concise
- The main aim of communiqué writing is to put down ideas in a clear and concise manner and targeting a specific group of people eg local, national, regional or international leaders.
- Key words and key demands should keep the communique interesting as well as acceptable.

## 5. DEVELOPING THE COMMUNIQUE

The process began on Day 2 and ended with an advocacy document on the last day of the conference. Participants were placed in three groups according to their regions and the regions were Eastern, Western and Southern regions. Each region was supposed to discuss and ventilate issue that are prevalent in their respective regions and those issues they wanted to be vented in the final communique and demands that they wanted their respective authorities to know so that authorities act on these demands.

Southern Africa (which was represented by Eswatini) had the following.

- ✚ Governments in the region should allocate more funds to issues to do with Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- ✚ Call on their governments to provide health care services (free)
- ✚ There should be a conducive environment put in place, by their respective governments, for young women and girls to take up and fit in leadership positions without being intimidated by men and the environment.

East Africa (represented by Rwanda) made the following submissions;

- ✚ There was lack of information and awareness among and between on sexual and reproductive health rights and education especially where it involves young women and girls. Therefore, there should awareness on the benefits of openness between family members and educate families on these aspects.
- ✚ Issues around the Female Genital Mutilation. This, it was mentions, was a scourge within the region.
- ✚ There are many issues around early marriages in the region.

Therefore, parents and communities should be made aware of consequences of these (above) practices on women and girls. On the other hand, governments in the region should put restriction measures and enforce laws on such practices.

- ✚ There is need for an integrated and collaborative approach on and against GBV in the regions

### **West Africa**

- ✚ There should be free and fair distribution of health facilities for SRHR;
- ✚ There is need for governments in the region to declare rape as a regional emergency;



- ✚ Family planning and contraceptives should be provided free of charge by government and available for anyone who require them without any limitations; and
- ✚ Governments in the region should implement laws and policies that are already in place and there is also a need to enforce such laws.

## **6. CONFERENCE KEY NOTE ADDRESSES AND SOLIDARITY MESSAGES**

### **6.1. Solidarity Messages from in country partners**

The in countries were given 1 minute to give their solidarity messages and three countries did so.

#### **Sierra Leone**

The presenter registered much appreciation for the initiative by organisers. She said was happy for ADYW and encouraged them to participate in the event as they articulate their problems and present their solutions to such problems. She called all partners to join hands and work together so as to achieve the set objectives.

#### **Kenya**

Jane from Kenya applauded the organisers for the first ever conference of this nature. She encouraged zero tolerance to GBV. She advised all the participants to take ownership of all the issues presented and fight to see that their governments are accountable and take responsibility.

#### **Tanzania**

Alima from Tanzania also appreciated the idea of using all languages of those who were in attendance which promoted inclusion. Alima reiterated that she has drawn many lessons from the discussions and lent a lot from other countries' problems shared and solutions provided.

### **6.2. Key note addresses**

#### **Key note address from the ministry of women affairs**

The minister of women affairs could not be available and therefore the address was done by the Gender commission as represented by Commissioner T. Hungwe.

She started by greeting everyone present and then stated that she was thrilled to note that AGYW are speaking with one voice on gender equity. She further pointed out that the Gender Commission added its voice to the call for investing in AGYW issues. She stated that many AGYW are deprived of their educational opportunities and access to health. She pointed out that due to Covid 19 girls were taken out of school and exposed to teenage

pregnancies and complications during child delivery. She further stated that there is need to make efforts to identify and reach out to most vulnerable girls so that they are kept in school for longer periods.

### **What Zimbabwe Gender Commission has done**

The Gender commission has made several recommendations to parliament to

- eliminate harmful cultural practices
- address the legislative regime on issues that affect AGYW
- harmonization of the laws that relate to marriage, domestic violence and criminal law
- lobbying for mandatory sentences for abuse
- when charging perpetrators of early marriages it should be a charge of rape not child marriage
- end discrimination at various institutions
- issued out statements against forced marriages

She further stated that the Gender Commission Act mandates the Gender Commission to conduct annual gender forum and this year (2021) the focus is on addressing child marriages. She further stated that public lectures will be conducted in tertiary institutions to create awareness on issues that affect AGYW. Mentorship programmes are underway for AGYW who are aspiring to join politics. The Gender Commission has commissioned a study of women and girls living on the streets on issues such as GBV and sexual reproductive health rights. She ended by encouraging AGYW to hold policy makers accountable to ensure that their rights are implemented. She implored AGYW to say no to things which they know will affect their lives forever.

### **The Tanzanian Ambassador to Zimbabwe**

The Tanzanian Ambassador to Zimbabwe, referred to a cry by African girls that “Give us books not husbands’. He pointed out that he was happy that the conference was about the rights of AGYW. He stated that the communique brings together the distinct voices of African girls and he promised to take it to his government. He also commented the AGYW for acknowledging efforts made in other countries for in order to achieve equality and celebrated them for highlighting areas which still need more work. He agreed that there

is real need to have a culture of people being treated equally and create space for entrepreneurship. He acknowledged that there is need for practical access to education.

He further stated that Tanzania is intentional about addressing issues that affect AGYW. He further stated that Tanzania has achieved a lot in as much as protection of AGYW is concerned. He stated that they have police desks across the country which are mandated to receive report of AGYW abuse. On the issue of access to education he stated that Tanzania pays for education for learners from grade 1 to form 4. In addition to that Tanzania has special schools for girls in its twenty five regions to ensure that every girl access education.

### **The Rwandan Ambassador**

The ambassador to Rwanda sent an apology for failure to attend in person. However, Ms Nikuse Musi, the first secretary in the Rwandan embassy represented her. She stated that the communique was well received and promised that it will reach the powers that be. She drew the attention of AGYW to the achievements of Rwanda post the genocide. She stated that Rwanda has elaborate policies on gender equality and these policies are being implemented. The Rwandan Constitution of 2003 provides for equality between men and women. She stated that on bridging the gender gap, Rwanda ranks second out of the 52 African countries. She further stated that Rwanda is ranked the best place to be in Africa. Women are in decision making positions. For example, 62% of members of the Rwandan Parliament are women. She further stated that women are encouraged to participate in decision making processes.

She pointed out that Rwanda is committed to women empowerment and she ended by imploring girls to be champions of change during the sixteen days against GBV.

### **The Nigerian Minister**

She stated that she was aware of issues affecting AGYW and summarised them as GBV domestic violence, spousal rejection, rape and socio-economic imbalances. She stated that there was a lot of anger around resulting in GBV. She pointed out that there is need to create space for everyone to be heard. There is need to speak more on issues around GBV. She encouraged AGYW that they can lead and that they should continue to speak to the future, wealth and health of the girls.

### **Eswatini Minister Lorraine Nxumalo**

She pointed out that it is not easy for women in Eswatini to win an election. She herself did not win an election but she was elected through the women's quarter. She stated that she is aware of challenges faced by AGYW such as expensive data, child marriages, and limited access to education due to Covid 19 among others. She promised to put issues related to AGYW so that they can be dealt with.

### **Member of Parliament McFord Sibanda**

He declared full support to AGYW and promised that he will make efforts to ensure that AGYW are allocated adequate resources and that issues affecting them are given priority.

### **The Canadian High Commissioner**

She stated that youth are the future and their voices matter. She encouraged AGYW to continue raising their voices about issues that affect them. She encouraged them to talk to donors and international organisations so that they hear AGYW concerns. She acknowledged that Covid 19 period is tough and that it is more difficult for AGYW. She further stated that during the period under review, child marriages increased dramatically across Africa. She further stated that there was an increase in school drop outs, unintended pregnancies and domestic violence. Restricted movement resulted in reduced solidarity. She encouraged responsible authorities to support communities to recover, re-enroll girls back to school and support victims of GBV. She ended by stating that Canada is committed to equality, ending sexual harassment and ensuring that perpetrators change their attitude.

### **Bill Cook Foundation**

It was represented by Mr Bill Cook himself. He stated that he is passionate about seeing every child in school especially girls. He stated that people are educated so that they are able to support themselves, their families and others in need and also for them to acquire skills to engage with others.

He pointed out that the Bill Cook Foundation supports more than twenty children who are currently stationed in Gweru. Some beneficiaries of the Cook Foundation have already graduated. He ended by imploring girls to embrace opportunities to be in school.

### **Elizabeth Nyamayaro**

She is the author of a book titled 'I am a girl from Africa.' She stated that she was raised by 'gogo' (grandmother). She stated that her grandmother taught her how important it is to be a child of the African soil where ubuntu is central to everything. Where the 'the I am because you are' mantra is central. She stated that our humanity binds us. Ubuntu means that what impacts on one us will have an impact on everyone. This is reflected in the way we greet each other 'tinofara kana muchifarawo' (we are happy if you are happy). She testified that at one point in her life she was saved from death by a certain girl in a blue uniform and this motivated her to pursue a career in humanitarian work.

She stated that in some instances being African was used against her. They said 'My skin is too dark, my hair is too curly, my voice is too deep...'. However this did not deter her from achieving her goals. She encouraged AGYW to be courageous in their fight against gender based discrimination and implored them to stand together as African girls.

### **Nyari Mashayamombe**

Founder of Tag a Life. She gave the vote of thanks. She stated that she was thankful that promises have been made. Going forward there was need for action. She implored the partners, ambassadors and policy makers to hear the voice of African girls as enshrined in the communique. She thanked the girls for their dedication. They committed two and half days of an intense conference, putting their voices together. She implored African leaders to be mindful of the special needs of AGYW as they rebuild from the ruins of Covid 19, they need to prioritize AGYW issues. AGYW 'want to go back to school, see the end of GBV, access health facilities, participate meaningfully in decision making and be shielded from the effects of climate change.'

She further pointed out that as African governments make budgets, they should commit resources to AGYW issues. One Farai was allowed to interject and she gave an example of the budget for Education in Zimbabwe. She pointed out that there is need to widen it to 30% and this should not include administration expenses and teachers' salaries. Nyari proceeded to invite leaders in the house to be champions of AGYW issues. She implored them to open their doors for AGYW and invite them to meet people in positions of power. She stated that a similar AGYW conference will be convened again in two years' time.

She ended by thanking the AGYW for their resilience and thanked everyone for their contribution towards the success of the conference.

## **7. CONFERENCE EVALUATION**

A Monkey survey was administered at the end to capture how the delegates felt about the three day conference.

### **How did you find the AGYW conference?**

1. The conference was well planned and educational. I thought that only our country had problems that concern girls but no, that was really a heads up for me, that it's not only us girls in Sierra Leone. I really had a lot of takeaways- Sierra Leone
2. It was an informative conference. Packed with the opportunities to learn, air out our grievances and suggest a road map for the betterment of Africa at large-South Africa
3. I found AGYW conference through my Leader of Shanduko Yehupenyu Child Care whose name is Mr Rongoti who is the one informed me about this AGYW-Zimbabwe
4. The conference was so good I have managed to link up with girls and share some challenges that we were facing as adolescent girls and young woman and I have found out that many girls from different countries we are facing the same problems- Uganda

### **How will it help you in your work with AGYW going forward?**

1. For me it's going to be a motivation that no matter what problems I have or other women have we still need each other. By sharing problems a solution can be accessed easily-Eswatini
2. The conference made me see issues that other Adolescent girls and Young women are facing and issues that I as an individual was facing but was unaware of and ignorant about. Hence it made me to begin advocating for the betterment of the Adolescent girls and Young women and to help in capacitating them- Tanzania
3. As I can it will help me to socialise with other young girls and women. It also gives refreshments to young girls and help to build confidence in everything they do-Ethiopia
4. The conference helped me in my work with adolescent girls and young women by sharing some problems that we are facing and we came up with some different ideas, we now know the way of boosting confidence , we are now able to stand for ourselves-Rwanda

**CONFERENCE PICTURES**

