SRI LANKA GIRL GUIDES ASSOCIATION

ASIA–PACIFIC ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH VOICE ON GENDER EQUALITY

January 2025

STOP THE VIOLENCE

Speak out for Girls' Rights

BEIJING +30 ADOLESCENT & YOUTH GROUP

A Project by

Beijing+30 Adolescent and Youth Group
&
Stop The Violence Campaign - Sri Lanka

ASIA-PACIFIC ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH VOICE ON GENDER EQUALITY

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Beijing+30 Adolescent and Youth Group: A group of adolescent girls (girl guides) and young women (youth members) connected through the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association, working voluntarily and independently, mobilizing more youth and resources to drive their girl-led activism and advocacy efforts aligning with national, regional, and global policy.

Stop The Violence Campaign: A campaign initiated by WAGGGS in 2011 and running in Sri Lanka since 2013 to contribute efforts to eliminate and prevent gender-based violence through the use of tools such as awareness raising, non-formal education, research, policy, advocacy, networking, partnerships and developing funds for community projects at the grassroots level.

Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association (SLGGA): The largest Movement for girls and young women in Sri Lanka has been operating since 1917 and has contributed service for the last 107 years. SLGGA is a member organization of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). Its mission is to support and empower girls and young women to achieve their fullest potential and become responsible citizens of the world.

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS): The largest voluntary movement dedicated to educating and empowering girls and young women worldwide, with a membership of 10.8 million girls and young women from 153 countries. Founded in 1910, for more than 114 years Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting have transformed the lives of girls and young women worldwide through non-formal education programmes, leadership development, advocacy and community action, to develop the skills and confidence needed to make positive changes in their lives, communities and countries.

During the consultation process and in writing this outcome report the below terms were referred and defined in the context of;

Adolescents   :   Any person / people between the ages of 10 - 18 years at the time of the consultation process.

Girls   :   Any person/people who identifies themselves as a girl / female and is between the ages of 10 - 18 years at the time of the consultation process

Youth   :   Any person / people between the ages of 18 and 35 years at the time of the consultation process.

Young Women :   Any person / people who identifies themselves as women / female and is between the ages of 18 - 35 years under the at the time of the consultation process.

Table of
CONTENTS

PREFACE

Gender equality remains a crucial issue that influences the lives of millions of adolescents and youth across the Asia-Pacific region. Despite global advancements, many young people continue to face systemic barriers to achieving gender equality in their communities, education, and futures. This report seeks to explore the multifaceted challenges and perspectives of adolescents and youth in relation to gender equality, with a specific focus on the Asia-Pacific region, where diversity in culture, economy, and social structure presents both unique challenges and opportunities.

Drawing upon comprehensive survey data, focus group discussions, and expert interviews, this report offers a deep, data-driven understanding of the realities that young people—especially those from marginalized groups—encounter. Through this extensive study , we aim to present not only the struggles but also the resilience, agency, and aspirations of adolescents and youth striving to overcome inequality in their daily lives.

The chapters within this report span a wide array of topics, including gender-based violence, access to education, sexual and reproductive health, and the representation of young people in leadership and decision-making. Through statistical evidence and real-life narratives, we bring to light the lived experiences of young people from different backgrounds, including LGBTQIA+ youth, those with disabilities, estate workers, and indigenous populations. These voices are often underrepresented in mainstream discussions on gender equality, and this report aims to give them the platform they deserve.

What makes this exploration even more critical is that it comes at a time when global policymaking is increasingly looking to the voices of young people to drive change. By providing actionable insights and evidence-based recommendations, this report serves as a vital resource for policymakers, local organizations, international bodies, and youth advocates seeking to create a more inclusive, equitable future.

In reflecting on the intersectionality of gender, culture, and identity, this report encourages the reader to view gender equality not as a monolithic issue but as a complex challenge shaped by many forces. The diversity of experiences shared within these pages underscores the importance of context-specific solutions in addressing gender inequality. It is our hope that the findings presented here will foster dialogue, inspire action, and contribute to more effective and sustainable strategies to empower youth across the Asia-Pacific region.

We are immensely grateful to the young people, community leaders, and experts who contributed their time, knowledge, and experiences to this work. Their involvement has enriched this report , making it a powerful tool for advocacy, education, and change. As we continue to strive for gender equality, it is our collective effort, guided by the voices and perspectives of youth, that will shape a better, more just world for future generations.

CHAPTER 1:
THE CONTEXT

Gender inequality remains one of the most pressing challenges facing the **Asia-Pacific region** today, with adolescents and youth bearing the brunt of many inequities. This report, is an outcome of the consultation process conducted by the **"Beijing+30 Adolescent & Youth Group"** - a team of girl guides and youth members of the **"Stop The Violence"** Campaign of the **Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association**.

Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association (SLGGA) is a member organization of World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) which holds consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Every year WAGGGS takes a delegation of young women to advocate on issues that affect girls and young women's lives around the world from gender inequality to climate crisis to poverty. This outcome report wishes to influence the advocacy campaign that WAGGGS will deliver targeting the 69th UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2025 which will be the 30th year global review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Subsequently, influence other major global, regional and national level policy frameworks.

This report seeks to shed light on the complex realities and diverse perspectives of young people in relation to achieving gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including surveys, focus group discussions, and expert interviews, this study provides critical insights into how gender-based violence (GBV) and inequality manifest in various social, cultural, and economic contexts.

The **Asia-Pacific region**, with its rich diversity of cultures, traditions, and societal norms, presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities in advancing gender equality. The findings in this report reveal how local traditions, gender roles, and economic factors intersect with global movements, often shaping the lived experiences of young people in profound ways.
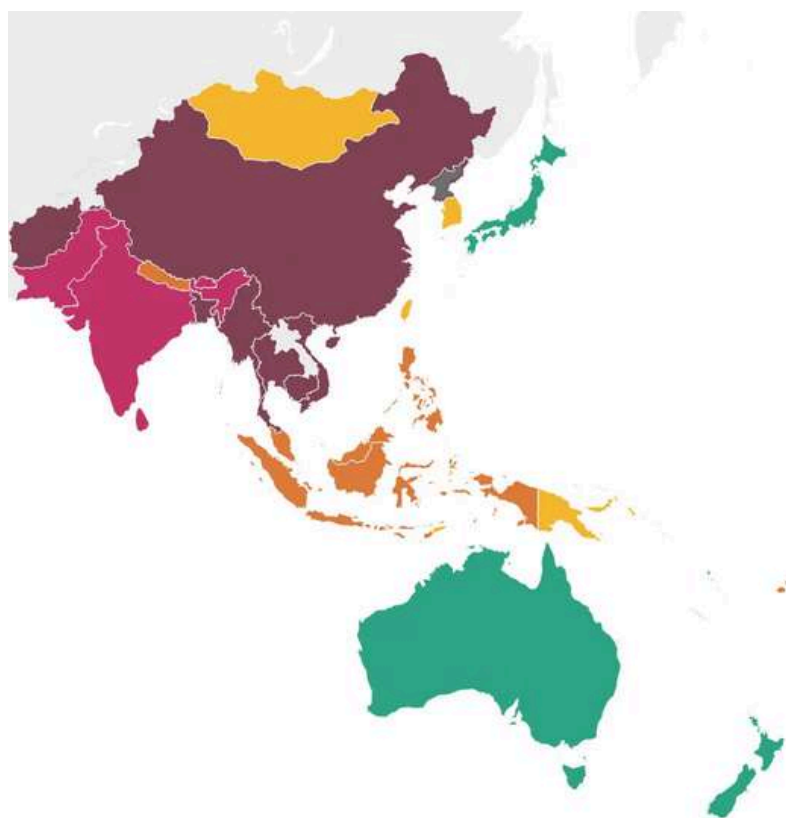
From issues of access to education, reproductive health services, and leadership opportunities to the pervasive nature of GBV, the report highlights how gender inequality is not a singular, universal issue but one that requires localized, context-sensitive solutions.

Our approach to this consultation process was inclusive and holistic, capturing the voices of almost 3,000 individuals from 27 countries representing vulnerable communities, including LGBTQIA+ youth, people with physical disabilities, estate workers, and indigenous populations. This diversity allows for a more nuanced and representative understanding of the barriers faced by adolescents and youth, ensuring that no group's experiences are overlooked. We hope this report will be a powerful tool for advocacy and policy change, empowering local and regional organizations with the data and insights needed to drive meaningful reform.

This work is also inspired by the significant progress made through global policy instruments and initiatives such as the **International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Sustainable Development Goals (2015)** and **Generation Equality Forums and Action Coalitions (2021)**. These frameworks have laid the foundation for global action, and our report seeks to build on this momentum by providing actionable, data-driven recommendations that will enable governments, NGOs, and international organizations to create more responsive, gender-sensitive policies and ensure effective implementation.

Almost

3,000
respondents

27
countries

contributed through:
- Online Survey
- Focus Group Discussions
- Key Informant Interviews

In conclusion, the findings of this report provide an understanding of the status of gender-based violence and gender inequality in the Asia-Pacific region from an adolescent and youth perspective, while offering practical insights for addressing these issues at both the local and regional levels. We hope that it inspires action, fosters dialogue, and leads to meaningful change that uplifts the rights and voices of adolescents and youth across the region.

We are grateful to all those who participated in this consultation process, as their stories and experiences have contributed to making this report a powerful tool for change. we believe together, we can work toward a future where gender equality is not just an aspiration, but a lived reality for all.

CHAPTER 1:
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Objective 01

To Analyze the Gender and Sexuality based Challenges Faced by Adolescent Girls and Youth in Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is home to a diverse population of adolescents and youth who encounter unique challenges shaped by cultural, economic, and societal factors. This study aims to uncover these challenges, ranging from gender-based discrimination and limited access to education to barriers in leadership and economic empowerment. By understanding these issues through data and narratives, the study provides a comprehensive view of the hurdles faced by young people, especially adolescent girls, in their pursuit of equality and opportunities.

Objective 02

To Identify Gaps in Youth Inclusion in Global Policies on Gender

Despite global commitments to achieving gender equality, significant gaps persist, particularly in integrating youth voices into policymaking processes. This study seeks to highlight areas where gender disparities are most pronounced and where youth perspectives are underrepresented. By pinpointing these gaps, the research sheds light on the disconnect between global frameworks and the realities faced by young people on the ground, advocating for more inclusive and equitable policies.

Objective 03

To Provide Actionable Recommendations to Global Decision-Makers and Other Multi-Stakeholders

A key objective of this study is to bridge the gap between research and action. Through its findings, the study offers concrete, actionable recommendations to policymakers, NGOs, CSOs and other stakeholders. These recommendations are designed to address systemic inequalities, promote youth participation, and foster environments where adolescents and young women can thrive. By focusing on practical solutions, the study aims to drive meaningful change in the region and beyond.

CHAPTER 2:
METHODOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

2.1 Methodology

We utilized multiple data collection methods to achieve our objective. These methods were chosen with clear direction for gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. It was evident to us that just relying on an online survey only wouldn't provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the depths of the issue especially affecting marginalized and under-represented regions.

Our efforts towards organizing focus group discussions were to address this gap and be able to capture the experiences and lived realities of the respondents directly.

We believe many subject matter experts and civil society organizations are working at the grassroots level on tackling and addressing these issues, therefore the Key Informant Interviews targeted at gathering their perspectives and recommendations on how best to address these issues with localized and sustainable solutions.

2,924	**63**	**03**
Online Survey Responses	**Focus Group Discussions (FGD) Particpants**	**Key Informant Interviews (KII)**

2.2 Online Survey

Our first and most prominent method was the creation of an online survey to gather data about the status of gender equality across the Asia Pacific region. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions to capture diverse perspectives on gender and sexuality based experiences and narratives. It was distributed widely through social media and targeted outreach, including at the Ceylona International Camp organized by the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association. The goal was to gather comprehensive data on gender-related experiences and attitudes to inform and enhance the campaign's initiatives. In total we obtained 2924 survey respondents.

Brainstorming → **Drafting the survey questions** → **Reviewing the survey questions** →

Releasing the finalized Survey ← **Finalizing the survey after corrections** ← **Trial the Survey to a Sample Group**
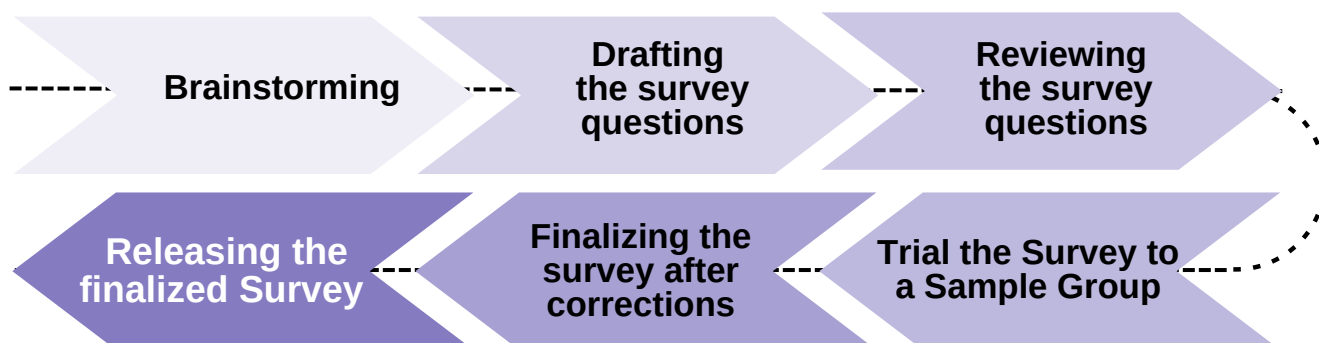
2.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Another primary aspect of our data collection process was the use of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These discussions involved participants from a diverse range of nations, including Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, India , Japan, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. To recruit participants, we utilized a combination of strategies including sharing interest forms on social media to invite individuals to express their willingness to participate, and conducting targeted outreach to organizations and vulnerable communities interested in joining the discussions. 06 FGDs were conducted.

The FGDs were moderated by members of our campaign team. During these sessions, a series of structured questions were posed to participants to obtain in-depth insights into their personal views and firsthand experiences.

The discussions also aimed to explore group dynamics and facilitate the exchange of ideas among participants. We ensured that there is a safeguarding officer available throughout the sessions that the participants were able to reach out, should there be a need.

2.4 Key Informant Interviews (KII)

A further aspect of our data collection process involved Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Three interviews were conducted with 3 experts individuals who possessed specialized knowledge on the relevant topics. We personally reached out to these experts to gauge their willingness to participate in the interviews. The KIIs were moderated by members of our campaign team. During these sessions, we asked a series of targeted questions designed to elicit in-depth expert input on the issues at hand. This approach allowed us to gather valuable insights and detailed perspectives from knowledgeable sources.

2.5 Anonymizing

To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of our respondents, we have implemented rigorous measures throughout our data collection process. Our survey was designed with anonymity in mind, incorporating a clear message to inform respondents about the confidentiality of their responses. We also ensured that no personal information was collected without explicit consent, and that all questions pertaining to personal details were made optional.

Similarly, we took careful steps to anonymize participants in our Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Prior to each session, we obtained informed consent from all participants to record and photograph the sessions. We also clearly communicated the confidentiality of their responses to further safeguard their privacy.

2.6 Demographic Overview

The survey conducted across the Asia-Pacific region gathered responses from a diverse set of countries representing East Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands.
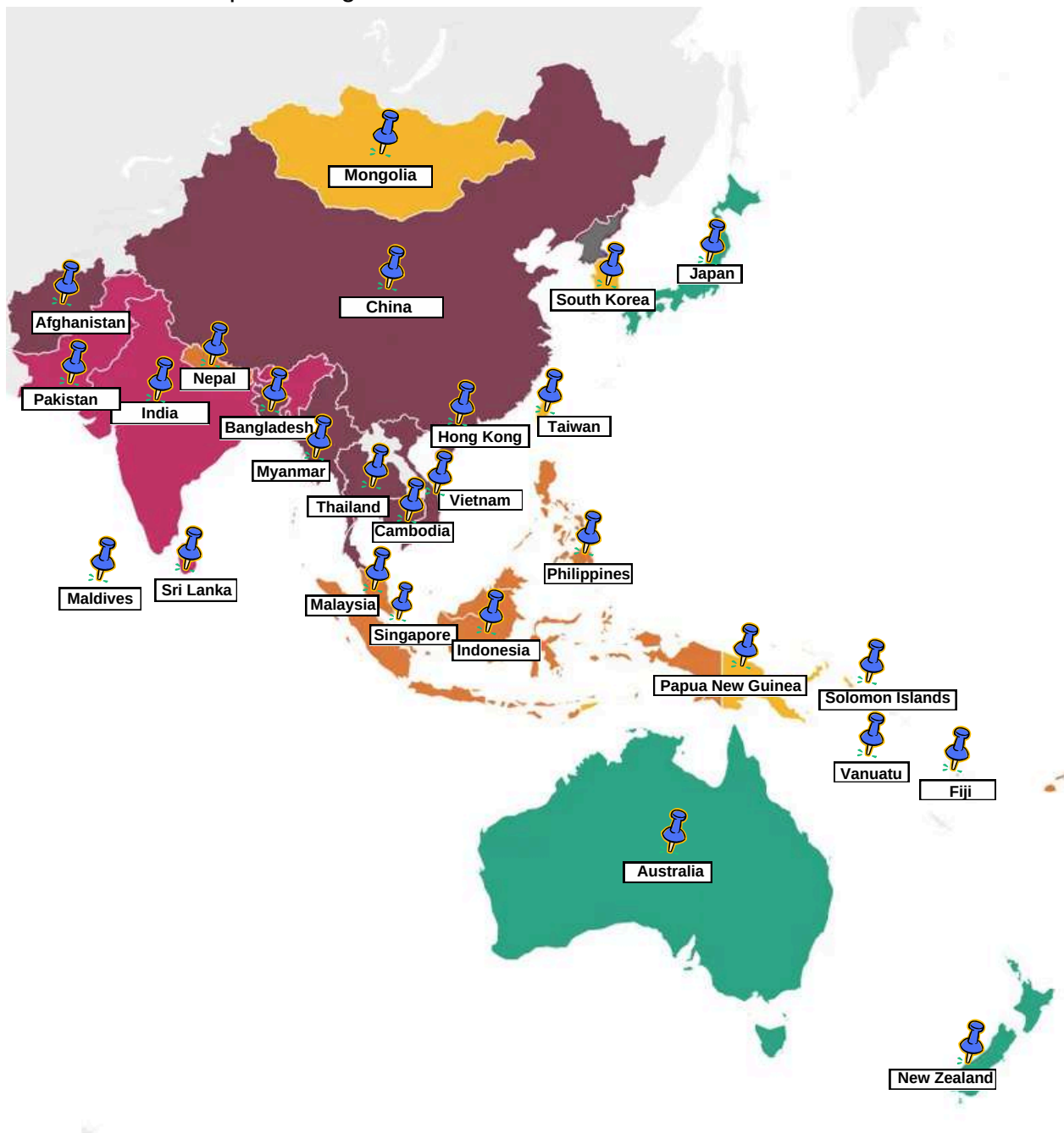
1. Afghanistan   2. Australia   3. Bangladesh   4. Cambodia   5. China   6. Fiji   7. Hong Kong
8. India   9. Indonesia   10. Japan   11. Malaysia   12. Maldives   13. Mongolia   14. Myanmar
15. Nepal   16. New Zealand   17. Pakistan   18. Papua New Guinea   19. Philippines   20. Singapore
21. Solomon Islands   22. South Korea   23. Sri Lanka   24. Thailand   25. Taiwan   26. Vanuatu   27. Vietnam

The survey provided space for respondents to share their country of origin, country of citizenship and country of residence to ensure we are inclusive to all who consider themselves as belonging to the Asia Pacific Region currently or at any point of time in their lives.

2.6 Demographic Overview

Age Distribution

Legend:
- 12-14
- 15-17
- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- Above 36

27%
41%
12%
9%
6%
3%
2%

Gender Distribution

Legend:
- Female
- Male
- other or undisclosed.

95%
3%
2%

Ethnic Composition

Legend:
- Ethnic Majorities
- Ethnic Minorities
- Chose not to disclose

72%
15%
13%

Religious Affiliations

Legend:
- Majority Religions
- Minority Religions
- Chose not to disclose

73%
16%
11%
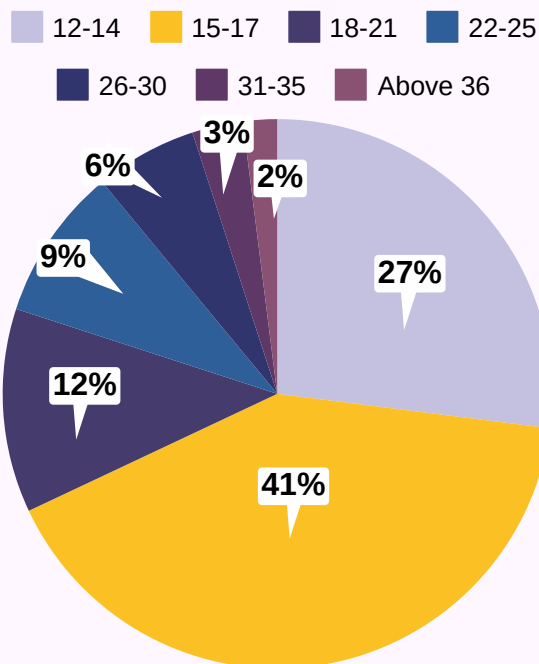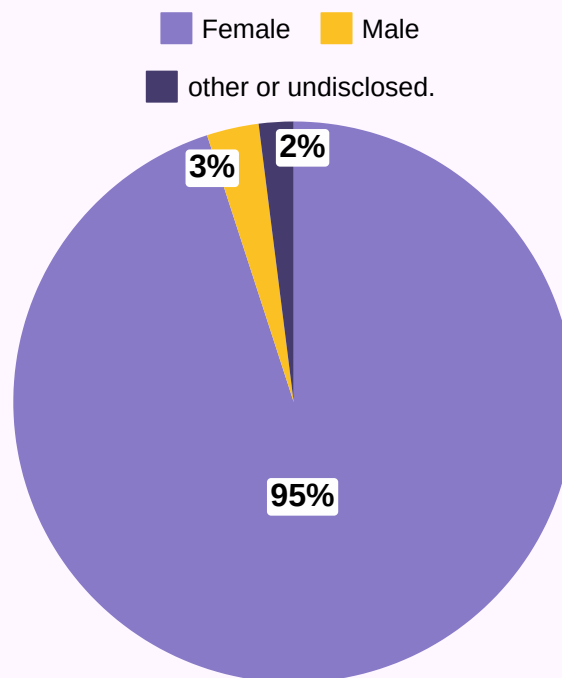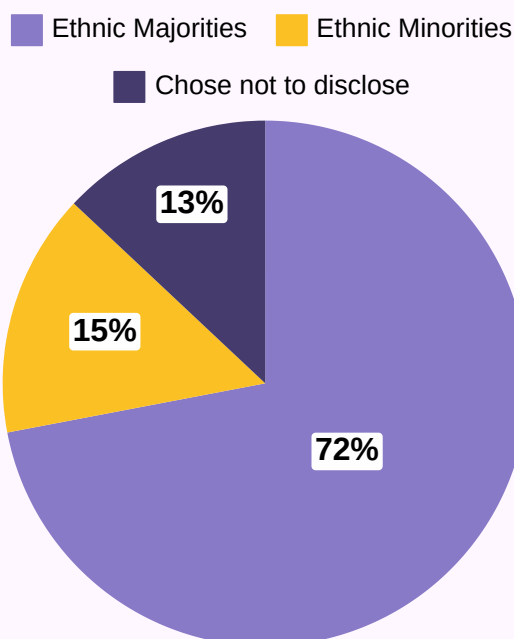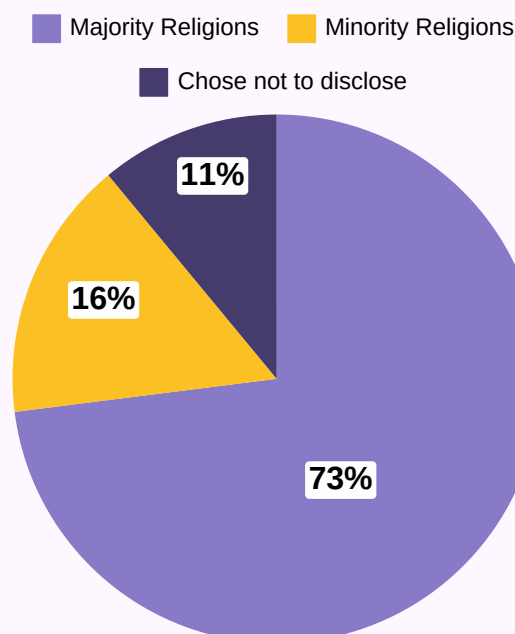
Note: The ethnic and religious affiliations were recorded based on the respondents' consideration or preference of whether they belonged to the ethnic and religious majority or minority of their location/country.

2.7 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a key aspect of our project. We believe that it is important to address the needs of all minorities and marginalized communities as it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how various social identities intersect and impact individuals' experiences of inequality and discrimination. By acknowledging that gender does not operate in isolation but intersects with other factors such as race, class, sexuality, and disability, intersectionality allowed us to capture the complexity of individuals' experiences from a diverse perspective. The intersectionalities that we reached out to included;

- **Youth belonging to racial/ethnic majority or minority**

- **Youth belonging to religious/faith-based majority or minority**

- **LGBTQIA+ community and other gender identities**

- **Youth facing caste-based discrimination (eg - Dalit community)**

- **Youth facing educational discrimination**

- **Youth with physical disabilities**

- **Youth with mental health conditions**

- **Marginalized socioeconomic classes**

Marginalization manifests in various ways, affecting individuals differently based on their intersecting identities and life experiences. The responses collected from the survey reveal a wide range of experiences, highlighting how factors like gender, race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, and personal identity intertwine to shape the challenges people face. Understanding these overlapping forms of discrimination is essential for fostering inclusivity and promoting social justice. By organizing these responses into clear categories, we can better grasp the unique struggles of each individual and the broader social dynamics at play.

CHAPTER 3:
MARGINALIZATIONS, GENDER STEREOTYPES, ROLES AND SOCIAL BELIEFS AND NORMS

Gender and Gender Roles: Navigating Expectations and Discrimination

In many Asian societies, women face the challenge of juggling both professional and domestic responsibilities, creating what is often termed a **"dual burden."** This expectation requires women to excel in their careers while simultaneously fulfilling traditional household roles. As one individual explains, **"Women who have a job outside the house also need to fulfill household responsibilities,"** illustrating the societal pressures placed on women. Alongside these burdens, **gender discrimination remains pervasive, manifesting through stereotypes that restrict women's opportunities.**

"

Comments like **"Girls can't play cricket"** or **"Girls don't know about IT"** reflect biases that undervalue our abilities in sports and technical fields. and **they always say that men are stronger, men are good at drawing maps or doing engineering things so they always look down on us…. girls also can learn. Girls also can do a lot of things like men do.**

(Questionnaire Survey)

"

These discriminatory attitudes often reinforce male superiority, as encapsulated by the notion of "boys and men being above girls and women." Furthermore, girls' and women's voices are frequently marginalized, with many striving for recognition and the ability to advocate for others, as exemplified by one woman's desire to "speak for the less fortunate."

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: Overcoming Discrimination and Struggles with Identity

Racial discrimination continues to affect individuals across various dimensions. Girls women of color often face unique obstacles not experienced by their white counterparts, and access to spaces such as clubs and organizations is sometimes denied based on skin color. Migration further complicates these challenges, as reflected by a Taiwanese migrant in Australia who describes feeling like a minority in their community.

> *I migrated to Perth, Australia from Taiwan 3 years ago. Taiwanese in Australia is really a minority community especially in Perth. Although at school we learned many minority cultures, I have never learned or heard about my culture at school.*
>
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

Historical contexts, such as the denial of education to Black individuals in favor of forced labor, underscore systemic inequities that persist to this day showshow the west is affected by racial discrimination while people with darker skin from South Asia continues to face exclusion in the East Asian communities. Language and cultural differences also play a role in shaping experiences. While language barriers can sometimes impede integration, individuals note that they are not always insurmountable, as seen in the statement,

> *"I speak a language that is different from the dominant language in our region, but it doesn't create barriers for me."*
>
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

Disability, Health, and Mental Health: Addressing Stigma and Barriers

The experiences of individuals with disabilities or health conditions reveal significant societal challenges. Neurodivergent individuals, such as those with autism or ADHD, often face stigma and barriers in daily life. Physical disabilities and health issues, such as visual impairments or severe allergies, further highlight the need for accommodations and understanding. Despite these challenges, some individuals maintain a positive outlook, demonstrating resilience in the face of adversity. Mental health issues are another prevalent concern, with conditions like depression, OCD, and anxiety underscoring the importance of support systems and destigmatization efforts.

Social and Economic Marginalization: The Role of Caste, Class, and Financial Struggles

Caste and class-based discrimination remain entrenched in many societies, creating significant barriers for marginalized communities. Education often serves as a pathway to empowerment, as illustrated by one individual's journey from an oppressed community to academic achievement.

Economic challenges compound these issues, with individuals facing financial difficulties or living in underdeveloped regions experiencing heightened vulnerability. Statements like **"Financial difficulty, single parent"** highlight the additional burdens placed on those with limited resources, while systemic inequalities, described as **"jungle rule,"** further exacerbate social and economic marginalization.

LGBTQIA+ Rights and Freedom of Expression: Striving for Acceptance

Discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals remains a pressing issue, often beginning in school environments where biases are prevalent. However, there is growing support for LGBTQIA+ rights, as demonstrated by individuals who advocate for gender equality and inclusivity. Simultaneously, restrictions on freedom of expression hinder personal and societal growth.

"No mental freedom, no freedom of speech"

highlights the stifling effects of these limitations, emphasizing the need for environments where individuals can express themselves freely and without fear.

(Questionnaire Survey)

"As a transgender individual, I constantly face discrimination in school. Majority of the teachers have harsh opinions on how girls should act, not cut their hair short. It's a must to wear earrings for some reason. I think it discriminates not only me, a boy, but also the girls and all other genders."

(Questionnaire Survey)

Intersecting Identities: Compounding Challenges of Marginalization

The intersection of various marginalized identities creates complex challenges for individuals. For example, women of color experience discrimination that spans both racial and gender spheres, underscoring the importance of understanding intersectionality. Acknowledging how race, gender, and other identities overlap is essential for addressing the nuanced and compounded forms of discrimination that individuals face. Recognizing these intersections is a crucial step toward creating inclusive solutions that consider the multiplicity of identities.

Personal Identity and Social Roles: Shaping Self-Perception

Individuals' personal struggles with self-expression and acceptance reveal the internal impacts of societal pressures. Many grapple with fears of judgment or difficulties in self-love, as reflected in statements like **"I find it hard to love myself."** Social roles also significantly shape identity, with traditional roles such as **"wife and mother"** influencing how individuals view themselves and their contributions. These narratives underscore the profound interplay between personal identity and societal expectations, highlighting the need for supportive environments that foster self-confidence and growth;

> *I feel that I am not good enough whether it is my looks or my work because I am often told that as a young woman, I'm not up to standard in any which way. My mother would say that even though I excel in work but that is not good enough because she doesn't think I have the qualities to be a good wife or mother and is not domesticated enough to do the role as a woman. This makes me wonder often about my own self worth.*

(Questionnaire Survey)

CHAPTER 4:
COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE)

83.4%
respondents reported basic awareness of critical social issues

In the Asia-Pacific region, a majority of respondents (83.4%) reported awareness of critical social issues such as human rights, gender equality, diversity, and gender-based violence.

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societies and empowering individuals, particularly in the context of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health. This strong general awareness reflects the growing emphasis on education as a tool for societal change. Formal education was identified as a key source of this knowledge, with **38.2%** of respondents acknowledging that their understanding stemmed from formal educational settings, while **25.3%** benefited from multiple sources, including informal and non-formal education.

> *I believe even though some basic topics related to CSE are covered in school text books, but rights based, age appropriate CSE isn't delivered in schools. My personal experience was often times teachers skip this chapter due to social stigma and taboos. Then the option left was accessing non-formal and informal ways but how do we rely on the accuracy and accessibility for all through these methods? Therefore there is a gap in awareness and understanding how one should promote healthy relationships and respect all beings. This leads to a lack of proper understanding on how to practice such positive attitudes and healthy behaviors. If it wasn't the case we would have had such a beautiful, safe and peaceful world free from any inequality, discrimination, harassment or violence.*

(Focused Group Discussion 01)

51.4%

respondents were either uncertain or said they lacked knowledge about the topic

However, the integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the education system remains a significant challenge. While **48.6%** of respondents are familiar with age-appropriate CSE, a concerning **26.7%** lack this knowledge, and **24.7%** remain uncertain. This highlights the gap in delivering comprehensive and accurate sexual and reproductive health education. In schools, the satisfaction with CSE coverage is mixed, with **46.9%** of participants expressing neutral opinions, while **14.5%** and **5.1%** reported dissatisfaction or extreme dissatisfaction. This indicates a need for improvement in how CSE is taught and its visibility within educational curricula.

Several barriers hinder the effective delivery of CSE, including cultural attitudes, stigma, and a lack of teacher preparedness. A significant **31.2%** of respondents cited social and cultural beliefs as major obstacles, while **9.8%** highlighted the fear of backlash from parents. These barriers contribute to the insufficient inclusion of CSE in educational systems across the region. The Asia-Pacific region must address these challenges to ensure that all students receive comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health, empowering them to make informed decisions and contribute to a more equitable and healthy society.

10%

believed that teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to confidently teach these topics.

> *Access to CSE is still a major gap in the region but beyond that, it is about having age appropriate, human rights based, quality education that is delivered by educators who are prepared and confident to talk about this stigmatized topic.*
>
> *(Focused Group Discussion 03)*

Major Barriers that hinders the delivery of CSE

Barrier	Percentage
Social and Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes	31.2%
Taboo perceptions and Stigma	14.4%
Parental backlash	9.3%

Scale: 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35
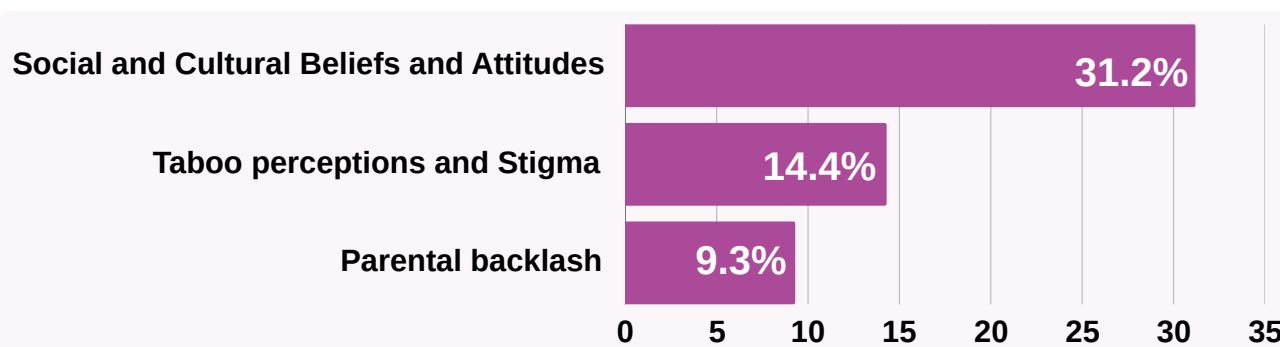
CHAPTER 5:
POVERTY, EMPLOYMENT & ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This study revealed that economic empowerment of women and girls was a major aspect in achieving gender equality. The female labour force participation rate in Asia and the Pacific has been shrinking in the recent years with a record of less than 40% from the total workforce in the region.

Lack of women and girls access to employment opportunities and financial resourcing is a barrier and discrimination they have to face in accessing economic and financial opportunities exacerbate their vulnerability towards poverty and facing inequalities.

The consultation process revealed the lack of policies to recognize unpaid care work and social protection benefits safeguard women and girls economic situation leads into them being more vulnerable to discrimination, poverty, trafficking and other inequalities.

The respondents ranked 12 areas they thought that girls and womens rights have made most progress and least progress in of which eradicating poverty ranked as number 1 in the least progress made list while young women's access to equal opportunities in employment ranked number 6 out of the 12 critical areas that is important in advancing gender equality. The survey also considered many other areas that is limiting girls and women's economic empowerment.

65.3%
of respondents identified multiple discrimination forms limiting their access to economic opportunities.

Eradicating poverty faced by women and girls - tops the list of 12 critical areas that made least progress in.

Throughout our research, we actively sought the perspectives of individuals from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, with a particular focus on Sri Lankan estate workers. These workers face significant economic barriers that hinder their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making roles.

As part of our investigation, **60.5% of respondents** agreed that there is a significant lack of resources available to adolescents and youth in the Global South to mobilize, organize, and make their voices heard at regional and global events.

These findings highlight the need for continued efforts to address economic inequalities and uplift marginalized communities, especially women and girls who are disproportionately affected by poverty.

Our research also emphasized the urgent need for improved access to financial literacy and resources, with many respondents highlighting that young women, in particular, face considerable challenges in accessing the financial tools and education necessary to achieve economic independence.

This lack of access to economic resources and decision-making platforms limits the potential for marginalized groups, particularly young women, to participate in economic empowerment activities.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted with participants from Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Japan revealed that, while progress has been made in addressing poverty among women, the advancements have been minimal. Participants across these regions expressed concerns that poverty eradication efforts, particularly for women, have not seen significant gains in recent years. This sentiment was further supported by Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with experts, who pointed out that economic disparities, limited access to essential resources, and the absence of sufficient funding are major obstacles that continue to impede women's ability to take on leadership roles and make decisions that could transform their communities.

Employment and economic empowerment were central to our project, especially because financial independence and economic empowerment are critical to the achievement of gender equality.

Respondents highlighted the persistent **gender wage gap**, with **65.3%** identifying multiple forms of discrimination that limit economic opportunities for females reflecting the entrenched discrimination girls and women face in workplaces.

> " Men are prioritized in promotions even when women outperform them
> *(Questionnaire Survey)* "

Our consultation sought to understand the attitudes towards economic emancipation, examining gender-based discrimination, unconscious biases, stereotypes that limit employment opportunities, and the impact of workplace discrimination on women.

Unpaid labor, particularly within the domestic sphere, continues to place a disproportionate economic burden on women. Traditional gender roles often confine women to household responsibilities, perpetuating their economic dependence. This persistent inequality in economic participation reinforces existing disparities, making it harder for women to achieve financial independence and participate equally in the workforce.

Focus Group Discussions delved deeper into understanding how care work affect the lives of girls and young women and their ability to engage in education and employment.

"Unpaid Care Work is affecting girls' lives disproportionately and it is a topic that decision-makers continue to ignore because it inherently comes to mind that women and girls are supposed to be doing that work"

(Key Informant Interview 02)

Ultimately, addressing economic inequalities for women requires tackling the root causes of gender-based discrimination, enhancing access to financial education and resources, and ensuring equal opportunities for women in leadership and employment. These actions will help foster a more equitable society, where women and girls can thrive economically and socially.

CHAPTER 6:
GIRLS & WOMEN AFFECTED BY WAR, EXTREMISM AND ARMED CONFLICT

The role of women and girls in peace and conflict resolution is a critical area of focus in our consultation. As vulnerable stakeholders, women and girls are often the primary victims of conflict, experiencing its devastating effects in ways that are unique to their gender.

20%
of respondents agreed that there is a lack of women and girls included inpeace and conflict resolution processes.

Their perspectives are indispensable in crafting long-term, sustainable peace agreements that address their specific needs, particularly in preventing and responding to violence.

The active involvement of women in peacebuilding ensures that the resolution processes are more inclusive and equitable, addressing the concerns of all members of society. Moreover, when women serve as community leaders, mediators, and advocates for change, they play a vital role in breaking the cycles of violence. They promote dialogue, foster healing, and strengthen social cohesion within communities, all of which are essential for maintaining peace and preventing further conflict. By empowering women in this context, peacebuilding efforts become more resilient, sustainable, and reflective of the diverse needs of affected populations.

This finding underscores the pressing need for change, highlighting the importance of ensuring that women and girls are not only heard but actively engaged in these crucial decision-making processes. **many participants shared their frustrations regarding the exclusion of women and girls from global advocacy platforms.** Despite being among the most affected by conflict, these women and girls continue to face significant barriers that prevent their full participation in peace and conflict resolution spaces

"True peace is impossible without the voices of women and girls. To build a just and inclusive world, we must break down the barriers that silence them and ensure their active participation in every decision that shapes our future."

(Focused group discussion 02)

Further insights gathered from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed that cultural and religious biases often restrict women's entry into policy spaces. **Experts also highlighted the lack of sufficient funding for initiatives that support women's involvement in peacebuilding efforts.**

> One of the biggest challenges we face is the limited funding available for initiatives that empower women to take active roles in peacebuilding. Without adequate financial resources, these programs struggle to sustain themselves or achieve meaningful impact, leaving a significant gap in addressing the root causes of conflict and inequality.
>
> *(Key Informant Interview 02)*

These cultural biases and financial barriers are critical obstacles that must be addressed to ensure more equitable and inclusive solutions in peace and conflict resolution.

The outcome of our research highlights the urgent need to eliminate the barriers that prevent women and girls from fully participating in these processes. Overcoming cultural biases and increasing funding for women's roles in conflict resolution are vital steps toward achieving more inclusive and lasting peace.

Prioritizing the voices of women and girls will not only strengthen peacebuilding efforts but also help create more resilient and empowered communities that can work together to overcome challenges and foster social harmony.

Women and girls must not be excluded from decion-making on matters that affect their lives and by ensuring women and girls have a seat at the table, we can create a more just and peaceful world for all.
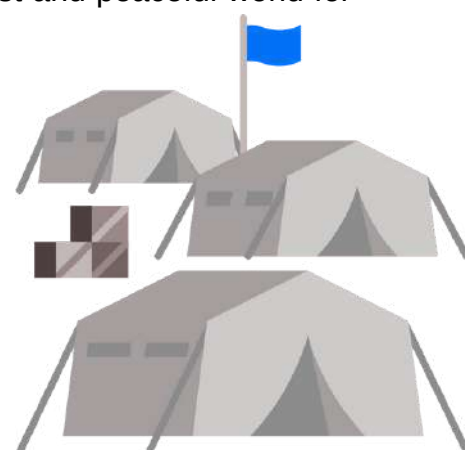
CHAPTER 7:
SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, HARASSMENT, AND DISCRIMINATION

Throughout the research, various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination were identified across multiple settings, reflecting the pervasive challenges faced by young women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region. These experiences highlight the deep-rooted societal biases and restrictions that continue to limit opportunities for girls and women, particularly in public spaces, workplaces, and educational settings.

Irrespective of many policies and laws introduced to prevent GBV over the years, but less progress have been achieved in eradicating all forms of gender based violence and harassment.

34.4%
emphasized minimal progress in eradicating GBV.

Cyber Bullying and Technology-based Harassment

This has intensified, especially post-COVID-19, as digital interactions increased. Women are disproportionately targeted, facing threats, abuse, and exploitation online. Ineffective laws and regulations fail to curb this growing issue, leaving victims vulnerable. Urgent reforms and robust enforcement are essential to ensure online safety and gender equity.

Refer Case Study 03, Page 43

7.1 Gender and Gender Roles: Navigating Expectations and Discrimination

Sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention are common forms of violence that many girls face in public spaces. These experiences demonstrates how public spaces often become sites of harassment where girls are objectified and made to feel unsafe based on their gender.

These experiences reflect a broader issue of sexual violence that contributes to the systemic marginalization and vulnerability of girls in everyday life. The emotional and psychological toll of these experiences can be profound, limiting their freedom and sense of security in public spaces. One girl shared her experience of catcalling while walking down the street:

> **I was once catcalled when I was walking down the street, and I have been harassed multiple times while travelling in the bus. It made me feel unsafe, and I realized that boys rarely have to deal with this.**
>
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

7.2 Discrimination at Educational Institutions & Workplaces

Discrimination in leadership roles is another significant area of concern. In the workplace, women's voices are often silenced by male dominance, and leadership positions are frequently reserved for men. One participant expressed frustration at this bias:

> *"People tend to appreciate men more than women, especially when it comes to leadership or critical thinking. It's as if our contributions don't hold the same value."*
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

In educational settings, **gender-based discrimination** is also prevalent, as seen in the example of school leadership:

> *"I wasn't given the opportunity to be the band leader at school because I am a girl. They preferred to have a male band leader, assuming he would be better at leading."*
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

In a world where 40% of respondents feel that boys receive more opportunities, we must ensure that educational institutions recognize and nurture the potential of every girl, paving the way for a more equitable future."

7.3 Societal and Cultural Restrictions

Societal restrictions on girls are deeply rooted in cultural norms that often place limitations on their freedom and opportunities. One participant shared:
"*My parents don't let me stay out late or go out alone because I'm a girl. Meanwhile, my brother enjoys much more freedom. It's not fair.*"

Such restrictions reflect traditional gender roles that position girls as needing protection, thereby denying them the autonomy enjoyed by their male counterparts. Another participant highlighted the gender-based assumptions that exist in public spaces, where girls' voices are often dismissed:

> *"People often put me down and don't listen to my opinion in public because I'm a girl. It's like my voice doesn't matter."*
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

This exclusion from public discourse is a form of **gender-based discrimination** that limits the visibility and voice of girls, reinforcing the notion that their opinions are less valuable than those of men. Additionally, **period stigma** remains a significant societal barrier for girls, as one participant shared:

> **"I wasn't allowed to worship or go inside certain places during my period because I was seen as unclean. It's humiliating and isolating."**
>
> *(Focused Group Discussion 06)*

Such exclusionary practices are rooted in cultural taboos surrounding menstruation and reflect broader societal attitudes that treat women's natural processes as shameful, contributing to their social exclusion.

7.4 Gender-Based Violence in Crisis and Climate-Linked Contexts

Another critical area of gender-based violence highlighted in the research is **disaster and climate-crisis-linked violence**, where women, especially in disaster-prone areas, face high risks due to resource scarcity and displacement. The impacts of climate crisis such as high temperatures and droughts affect girls' and women's lives disproportionately from having to miss school to help the household to face harassment and violence while having to walk extensive distances to fetch water and firewood. They are more vulnerable to facing Gender-based violence during environmental disasters such as floods, landslides and wildfires.

> **"Women in disaster-prone areas are at increased risk of violence, especially when resources become scarce."**
>
> *(Focused Group Discussion 03)*

Experts emphasized the need to address these vulnerabilities, particularly in the context of climate change and its effects on violence against women. Therefore, governments and other stakeholders must prioritize gender-sensitive disaster management policies and programmes. Furthermore, women and girls must not only be considered a vulnerable group, but rather empower and engage them as agents of change in mitigating climate risks, adapting to adversities and staying resilient.

7.5 Stereotypes and Gender Limitations

Gender stereotypes, particularly around **physical strength** and **sports participation**, continue to limit opportunities for girls. One participant reflected on how **gender assumptions about physical ability** restrict girls from engaging in tasks typically deemed "male":

> *"In cases of lifting something heavy or appearing strong, girls are seen as incapable. It's disheartening when people assume we can't handle such tasks because of our gender."*
>
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

Similarly, **in sports,** many girls face barriers due to preconceived notions about their abilities. One athlete shared her frustration:

> *"I wasn't allowed to join the rugby team because my teacher said it's a sport for boys. But I love rugby, and I know I can play just as well."*
>
> *(Questionnaire Survey)*

These stereotypes reinforce a narrow view of women's capabilities, perpetuating gender inequality in both physical and social domains.

By categorizing these experiences into distinct forms of violence, harassment, and discrimination, it becomes clear that the struggles faced by women and girls are multifaceted and deeply embedded in cultural, societal, and institutional norms. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that tackles not only the legal frameworks but also the societal attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination.

The orthodox belief that girls are less capable, noted by 30% of respondents, must be challenged. Let's advocate for a world where potential is measured by ability, not gender! Stand up to break the stereotype

CHAPTER 8:

REPRESENTATION OF GIRLS IN MEDIA & SEXUALIZATION OF GIRLS

Media's portrayal of girls often reinforces stereotypes.

66.4%
agreed that girls lack representation in all forms of media.

Respondents called for:
- **Promoting diverse narratives.**
- **Highlighting achievements beyond beauty standards.**

The media's portrayal of girls and women, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, remains a significant concern, with the portrayal of girls often reinforcing damaging stereotypes. The study revealed that the media frequently presents girls in a narrow and objectified manner, primarily focusing on their physical appearance rather than their skills, achievements, or potential. This persistent sexualization not only limits how girls are viewed in society but also impacts their sense of self-worth, body image, and overall mental health.

> *I believe there are two issues here - one is the media industry having less females working - less writers, less directors, less editors, less screen time for female actors. Then the other issues is the lack of sensitivity in the media industry towards gender and sexuality. Reporting of GBV cases without safeguarding privacy, harmful portrayals like domestic violence without showing it is wrong and unacceptable, sexualization of females and objectifying women and girls in the name of gaining more fame and business, and discrimination and harassment faced by people working in the industry itself are gaps that needs to be addressed.*
>
> (Key Informant Interview 03)

One of the most concerning trends identified in our research is the overwhelming emphasis on beauty standards in the media, which contributes to the early sexualization of girls. This narrow focus on external beauty often leads to girls being evaluated based on their looks rather than their intellect, character, or achievements. As a result, girls may internalize these beauty ideals, which can negatively affect their self-esteem and sense of identity. The media's portrayal of girls as objects to be admired or desired reinforces harmful gender norms, positioning girls as passive figures rather than active agents of change, thereby limiting their aspirations and opportunities in various sectors.

> "I'm often asked why do I have so many pimples, why is your sister fair and you are so dark, why have you put on weight and all these questions are making me wonder whether I look so bad that every person have to make a comment on my body and appearance. I sometimes want to avoid meeting certain people because of these comments"
>
> (Focused Group Discussion 06)

In terms of representation, 66.4% of survey respondents agreed that girls and women are significantly underrepresented in the media, with their voices often excluded from key discussions and decision-making platforms. This lack of representation goes beyond the physical portrayal of girls, reflecting a broader societal issue in which girls' perspectives and contributions are marginalized. The respondents emphasized that media content needs to evolve and reflect a more inclusive narrative, one that showcases girls and women in a variety of roles—leaders, activists, professionals, and innovators—rather than reducing them to stereotypes tied solely to beauty.

Further discussions with youth and experts in the KIIs and FGDs reinforced this need for change. Many young participants noted that despite some progress in recent years, the media still often portrays girls and women in a limited and sexualized manner. They called for a shift toward more empowering and diverse narratives that highlight girls'

achievements and capabilities, thus promoting healthier role models. Respondents stressed the importance of media outlets using their platforms to challenge harmful stereotypes and create positive portrayals of girls, allowing them to see themselves as more than just their physical appearance.

In conclusion, our research indicates that the portrayal of girls in the media needs substantial reform. More inclusive, empowering, and diverse media narratives can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and amplify the voices and achievements of girls and women, fostering a more equitable society.

CHAPTER 9:
SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS AND SERVICES

In the Asia-Pacific region, sexual and reproductive health rights and services remain a significant challenge, with limited progress made toward achieving equitable access for women and girls. One of the most pressing concerns identified by participants in our research was the limited access to safe and affordable sexual and reproductive health services.

over
30%
saw less progress in areas like access to safe sexual and reproductive health services.

Despite international commitments to improving sexual and reproductive health, many countries in the region still face severe limitations in this regard, which directly impacts the health and well-being of women and girls.

In particular, access to healthcare services related to reproductive health remains unsafe, illegal and unaffordable in many Asia-Pacific countries, forcing women to seek unsafe procedures that jeopardize their health and even their lives.

> **If we're going to look into gender-based violence and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, I think we've been stagnant and most importantly on access to abortion and post abortion care, I think instead of going forward, we're going ten steps backwards. Again, the issue of abortion has been controversial, but also a lot of issues and concerns revolved around it in so many aspects, but I just wanted to highlight that the political leadership of those who are in power, for example, in the countries who have the money –I'm just going to say the Western countries– the funding for abortion has been cut.**
>
> *(Key Informant Interview 01)*

Unsafe termination of pregnancies is a critical public health issue, especially in countries where it is heavily restricted or criminalized. Women often resort to unsafe, illegal procedures because they do not have access to safe and legal options. This can result in complications such as hemorrhaging, infections, and long-term reproductive health issues, which place a heavy burden on both individuals and the healthcare system.

The lack of legal protection for reproductive rights leaves women vulnerable and unable to make decisions about their bodies, undermining their autonomy and access to necessary healthcare.

> *In the Philippines, people often perceive individuals with disabilities as asexual, which leads to their sexual and reproductive rights being overlooked or denied. Take, for example, an 18-year-old woman with an intellectual disability who became pregnant. Despite expressing her desire to have children, her parents forced her to undergo a permanent sterilization procedure without her consent. This devastating act highlights the systematic denial of agency and rights to women and girls with disabilities. It underscores the urgent need for inclusive policies and global frameworks that specifically address their unique challenges and protect their rights.*

(Key Informant Interview 01)

Governments must pay more attention to the sensitivities associated with sexual and reproductive health services by providing adequate training to service providers to break the stigma, social conditioning, and negative attitudes built within individual and discriminatory systems. This will ensure that patients feel confident, comfortable, and respected when accessing the available services.

> **I have on several occasions witnessed how the LGBTQIA+ community is marginalized in the school I currently learn at. So I find it unfair that people have to conceal their relationships and all that simply because people whose lives it wont even affect decide to think it's a problem. If you don't like it and dont want to get involved in it, that's okay, but why ruin someone else's life?" while another has shared that "As a genderqueer, non-conforming woman in a conservative Fijian society, I've faced significant challenges. I'm often misgendered, which leads to feelings of exclusion and frustration, and I'm frequently threatened by men and harassed by strangers when I'm out with women."**

(Questionnaire Survey)

Moreover, a lack of awareness and understanding of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) further exacerbates the situation. **A total of 22% of participants pointed to the stigma surrounding discussions of sensitive sexual and reproductive health issues as a major barrier to advancing CSE in the region.**

In many societies, discussions around sex, contraception, and reproductive health are often regarded as taboo, and open conversations are stifled by fear of social backlash or parental disapproval. This stigma not only isolates young people but also leaves them ill-equipped to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. It also perpetuates myths and misconceptions that can lead to unsafe sexual practices and an increased risk of **sexually transmitted infections (STIs)** and unintended pregnancies.

Furthermore, this stigma surrounding sexual and reproductive health services often discourages young people, particularly girls, from seeking the necessary care. When CSE is not adequately implemented, it limits the ability of individuals to make informed choices about their bodies, relationships, and health.

The lack of education about contraception, reproductive health rights, and safe sexual practices also contributes to perpetuating cycles of poverty, poor health, and gender inequality, as women and girls continue to face barriers to education, economic opportunities, and full participation in society.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, including legal reforms, improved access to healthcare services, and comprehensive education about sexual and reproductive rights. Governments must prioritize these issues as part of their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, ensuring that women and girls have the knowledge, resources, and support to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

CHAPTER 10:
GIRLS AND WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Despite the growing global recognition of the importance of gender equality in leadership, girls and women in the Asia-Pacific region continue to face significant barriers to achieving equal representation in decision-making roles. This data underscores the fact that while progress has been made, it remains slow and uneven across different sectors and regions.

One of the key barriers to girls' and women's participation in leadership roles is the lack of access to quality education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Without a solid educational foundation, girls and women are less likely to possess the skills and qualifications necessary to pursue leadership roles in politics, business, and society.

In many parts of the Asia-Pacific region, traditional gender roles prioritize the education of boys over girls, which further limits opportunities for women to advance in their careers and communities.

66.4%
respondents agreed that women and girls in the Asia Pacific region lack voice and representation in decision-making spaces.

19.4%
ranked girls and women's participation in decision-making roles as an underprogressed critical area.

This educational gap has a long-term effect, as it perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits women's ability to break free from subordinate societal roles.

Additionally, gender discrimination remains a widespread issue in political, corporate, and societal sectors. Women often face overt and subtle forms of bias that prevent them from rising to positions of authority. In politics, for instance, women are underrepresented in elected offices and decision-making bodies, often being sidelined due to stereotypes that question their capabilities as leaders. In the corporate world, women encounter the "glass ceiling," where their career progression is limited despite their qualifications and experience. Even in social spaces, girls' and women's opinions and contributions are frequently undervalued, leading to their exclusion from influential discussions and decision-making processes.

Cultural norms and patriarchal systems also play a significant role in hindering girls' and women's access to leadership opportunities. In many societies, traditional gender roles discourage women from pursuing leadership positions, as leadership is often perceived as a male-dominated domain. Girls and women may face pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over professional ambitions, and societal expectations often limit their autonomy in making decisions about their careers and futures.

In Sri Lanka, the situation is particularly dire for girls and women in the estates, where leadership opportunities are even more scarce. According to key informant interviews (KIIs), women in Sri Lankan estates face unique challenges due to socio-economic barriers, lack of educational resources, and entrenched cultural norms.

Overcoming these barriers requires concerted efforts from governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to promote gender equality and provide women with the education, resources, and support they need to succeed. This includes creating policies that encourage girls' and women's participation in leadership roles, providing mentorship and training programs, and challenging the societal norms that continue to undermine women's leadership potential. Only through these efforts can we ensure that girls and women, especially in marginalized communities, have an equal opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and shape the future of their societies.

> **"Girls and women in Sri Lankan estates face a unique set of challenges rooted in socio-economic barriers, limited access to education, and deep-seated cultural norms. This systemic marginalization keeps them from stepping into leadership roles, while the absence of support networks and mentorship leaves them without the tools or confidence to break the cycle. It's a stark reminder that empowering these girls and women requires targeted interventions and sustained support to foster their growth and leadership potential."**
>
> *(Key Informant Interview 02)*

CHAPTER 11:
CLIMATE CRISIS & NATURAL DISASTERS: THE GENDER GAP

The disproportionate impact of climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation on women and girls is a pressing issue that remains inadequately addressed in many parts of the world. Particularly in developing regions, women and girls often play central roles in gathering food, water, and fuel, making them more vulnerable to the effects of environmental change. However, despite their vulnerability and critical role in managing household resources, women and girls are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, policy development, and environmental initiatives. This exclusion is a significant challenge in effectively addressing the gender dimensions of climate change and disaster risk reduction.

> **"While I was working in an organization, we were doing research and we worked along the most remote parts of Papua New Guinea where there was logging taking place there. So while we were working there, I've realized that mostly women are affected with issues concerning the environment. The forest was their own cell, where they got all the food, the proteins, the medicine, the herbs and everything that they needed, but when logging companies came in, it took it away from them and most of the women are suffering because the benefits were not given to the women and the services that were promised to be provided like health, education, roads and bridges were not provided.. After they left, the women were mostly suffering with health issues, and most of them were dying because they would not have access to healthcare. "**
>
> *(Focused Group Discussion 03)*

Our survey results reveal a stark picture of gender disparities in climate-related decision-making. Only 5% of respondents believe that progress has been made in integrating gender dimensions into climate change and environmental policies. Meanwhile, 10% of respondents feel that the least progress has been achieved in addressing the specific needs and rights of women and girls in the context of climate change and natural disasters. This limited progress highlights the need for a more concerted effort to prioritize gender equality in environmental and disaster response strategies.
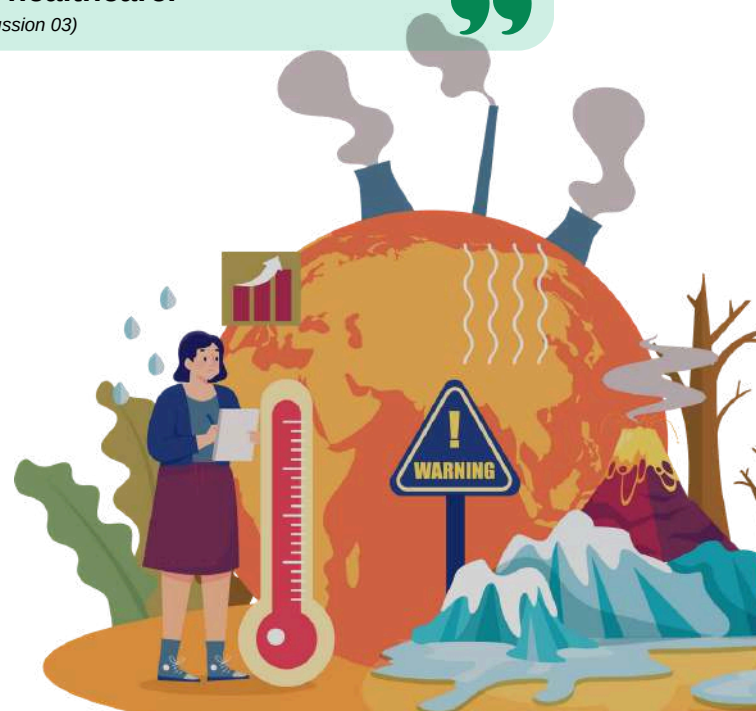
In many societies, cultural norms and gender roles often restrict women and girls' participation in activities outside the home, including leadership roles in environmental and climate-related initiatives. These cultural barriers lead to their exclusion from important decision-making spaces, such as governmental bodies, climate organizations, and corporate boards that shape disaster management, environmental policy, and resource management. As a result, policies aimed at addressing climate change and environmental degradation often overlook the specific challenges that women face, such as the impact on their livelihoods, health, and security. Without a gender-sensitive approach, these policies are less likely to provide effective solutions that consider the unique needs and contributions of women and girls.

> **"Climate change intensifies gender-based violence, as women disproportionately face the impacts of resource scarcity and displacement. Governments and international organizations must prioritize strengthening policies and support systems to prevent and address GBV in climate-affected regions, ensuring the safety and resilience of vulnerable communities."-**
>
> *(Key Informant Interview 01)*

To bridge this gap, a shift towards gender-responsive climate policies is essential. Empowering women and girls through education and capacity-building initiatives can enhance their participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. It is also crucial to promote women's leadership in environmental management, particularly in grassroots initiatives, where they often have the most direct knowledge and experience of their communities' needs. Creating platforms for women to contribute their voices and solutions in policy discussions and environmental projects will not only ensure that their rights are represented but also improve the overall effectiveness of these efforts.

> **"30 years ago Beijing Platform for Action identified "Women and Environment" as one of the 12 critical areas and then recently with the Generation Equality initiative the action coalition on Climate Justice proved how urgent we need to address this issue. There is no more waiting and we need a targeted set of concrete, ambitious and immediate actions to address this issue which is affecting women and girls disproportionately.**

Recognizing women as agents of change and involving them in decision-making processes is vital for creating sustainable and inclusive solutions to environmental challenges. Gender-sensitive policies and programs will not only help mitigate the impacts of climate change and natural disasters on women and girls but also empower them to become leaders in their communities, driving long-term positive change for all.

CHAPTER 12:
RECOMMENDATIONS

01. Global Trends and Emerging Critical Areas

The findings of the survey highlight significant global trends in the fight for gender equality.

With 69% of respondents identifying social media as a crucial tool for influencing gender equality, it is clear that digital platforms are now central to activism and advocacy.

Social media's power to amplify voices and foster collective action is undeniable. To capitalize on this, organizations and individuals must leverage digital platforms to raise awareness, engage with wider audiences, and advocate for systemic changes.

The growing reliance on research in advocacy, cited by 56% of respondents, indicates that data-driven, evidence-based approaches are essential for driving policy reforms.

By focusing on reliable data, we can effectively challenge existing gender inequalities and promote sustainable change.

02. Changes in Global Policy Frameworks

The survey findings emphasize the need for a paradigm shift in global policy frameworks to address gender equality. A significant 43% of respondents cited social, religious, and cultural taboos as barriers to advancing gender equality, underscoring the challenge of entrenched societal norms.

Addressing these barriers requires a re-evaluation of policies to challenge these deeply rooted ideologies. Policies must be flexible and inclusive, addressing not only legislative barriers but also cultural and societal norms that perpetuate discrimination.

Additionally, 40% of respondents identified the lack of financial resources as a significant challenge, reinforcing the need for increased investment in gender equality initiatives.

Policymakers must prioritize gender-sensitive budgeting, allocation of resources and investments that would enable the sustainable progress made towards achieving gender equality.

03. Adolescent and Youth in Decision-Making from Local to Global

The survey reveals a strong call for youth inclusion in decision-making processes,

with 90% of respondents urging governments and international bodies, like the UN, to amplify youth voices.

This overwhelming demand signals that young people must be recognized as key stakeholders in shaping the policies that affect their lives. Youth representation in decision-making can catalyze innovation and provide fresh perspectives on gender equality. Encouraging youth-led initiatives and advocating for their inclusion in governance structures will

ensure that the concerns of the younger generation are addressed at local, national, and global levels. By empowering young leaders, we are investing in a brighter, more equitable future.

04. Resourcing Adolescent & Youth Representation and Youth-led Initiatives

The lack of financial resources remains a major barrier to gender equality, as highlighted by 40% of respondents.

This finding underscores the importance of securing funding for youth-led initiatives and ensuring that youth representation is adequately resourced. Investment in youth-led initiatives is crucial for creating sustainable change, as young people are often at the forefront of innovative and transformative movements. Governments, international organizations, and donors must prioritize the funding of youth-led projects, ensuring that young leaders have the financial backing to pursue their advocacy and create lasting impact.

By resourcing these initiatives, we are fostering the growth of youth-driven solutions to the complex challenges of gender equality.

05. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Strategies

The findings highlight the ongoing need for robust diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies in tackling gender inequality. The survey showed that 22% of respondents believe that gender-based discrimination persists in leadership roles, indicating that women and girls still face significant challenges in accessing leadership opportunities. This calls for the implementation of DEI strategies that challenge discrimination and promote equal recognition for all leaders, irrespective of gender. **Moreover, 30% of respondents emphasized the need to challenge stereotypes that suggest girls are less capable.** To break these stereotypes, DEI strategies must focus on promoting gender-neutral perceptions and creating opportunities for girls to demonstrate their capabilities.

By advocating for these changes, we can ensure that women and girls have equal opportunities to lead and succeed. As shared by one of the respondents, it is important to look at how the DEI policies and strategies must be implemented in a way that holds everyone accountable to practice those principles, that way it will be more effective and bring the positive change we expect to see.

> As a young woman working in the private sector, I know many organizations do have DEI policies and strategies but the question is
> **"What about implementation and practicing what we preach?"**
>
> I often see how **unconsious biases** and **harmful attitudes** affect and create room for **gender inequality.** It starts from the job advertisement stage - which has different pay for the same work and job descriptions that indirectly encourage boys and men to apply. Then during the interviews how many times I have had to call out for asking irrelevant and inappropriate questions which then often has led to me not getting the job.
>
> Even if you are recruited, still navigating the competitive male-dominated corporate world is even more difficult as a young woman. There is of course the **pay gap, lack of promotions and career progressions, lack of training opportunities** and even be subjected **harassment** which all affects an individual's work experience and ability to contribute full and meaningfully, biggest problem is women and girls are much more vulnerable to experience this than men and boys.
>
> *(Focused Group Discussion 04)*

CHAPTER 13:
THE ROLE OF GIRL-LED MOVEMENTS & VOICES IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

This consultation process which was co-designed and co-delivered by adolescent girls and young women was an intentional effort to give decision-making power to the girls to take lead in how we approach and execute this project. As shared by many girls who contributed to our study, that girls inherently face "double discrimination" due to their gender and age, therefore this chapter is dedicated particularly to emphasize the demands and recommendations that came from the adolescent girls.It is critical to acknowledge that girl-led movements have the power to drive meaningful change and amplify the voices of young women and girls across the Asia-Pacific region. By fostering leadership, challenging societal norms, and advocating for systemic changes, these movements can contribute significantly to advancing gender equality.

Here are key recommendations for buidling girl-led movements and supporting girl-led activism to promote gender equality:

1   Leveraging Digital Platforms for Advocacy

In the digital age, social media and online platforms have become essential tools for advocacy and awareness-raising. Girl-led movements can utilize these platforms to share stories, raise awareness, and mobilize support for gender equality. By creating content that educates, empowers, and engages audiences, these movements can reach a wider audience, especially in rural and remote areas. The ability to engage with policymakers and global organizations through digital advocacy will also help amplify their message on a larger scale.

> *"Leveraging digital platforms is key to bridging generational gaps, fostering wider participation, and facilitating the exchange of intergenerational knowledge. These platforms create spaces to mobilize and organize around shared intersectional feminist goals, uniting voices across age groups to drive meaningful and inclusive change."*
>
> *(Key Informant Interview 03)*

2   Challenging Cultural and Societal Norms

Cultural and societal taboos often limit the progress of gender equality, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Girl-led movements must take the lead in challenging these deeply entrenched norms through grassroots campaigns, community engagement, and public discussions. By fostering open dialogues about gender stereotypes, child marriage, and access to education, these movements can create a ripple effect that encourages communities to reassess their traditional views and practices.

3   Building Coalitions and Partnerships

Collaboration is a powerful tool for driving social change. Girl-led movements should form alliances with other youth groups, women's organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to drive their activism and initiatives. Building relationships with governmental authorities and inter-governmental bodies such as the United Nations is important in creating multi-stakeholder and inter-generational partnerships to achieve the common goal of gender equality. These partnerships can provide access to funding, policy advocacy platforms, and opportunities for global visibility that will help them strengthen their advocacy efforts.

4   Adolescent Girl Representation in Policy & Decision-Making Spaces

Adolescents, particularly girls, have valuable perspectives on the issues that directly affect them. Girl-led movements can push for increased adolescent and youth representation in decision-making bodies at local, national, and international levels. This could include pushing for youth quotas in political representation, creating platforms for girls to engage in policy discussions, and advocating for gender-sensitive policies that prioritize the needs and voices of young girls. Though there has been progress made over the years, however adolescent girls' leadership and engagement in global policy spaces continue to show limited participation due to several reasons discussed during the focus group discussions such as lack of funding, strict safeguarding protocols and barriers, to obtaining visas and requirement of a parent/guardian to accompany in international travels.

5   Focusing on Education, Skill Development

Education is the key to breaking the cycle of gender inequality. Girl-led movements continue to advocate for equal access to education for all girls, ensuring that they receive the necessary skills and knowledge to lead and succeed. Additionally, movements should focus on providing leadership training, career development workshops, and entrepreneurial skills to empower young girls and prepare them for leadership roles in their communities. Knowledge and skills help them to break the cycle of poverty and overcome economic difficulties, therefore it is critical that girls have access to quality education and skill development.

6   Addressing Barriers to Economic Empowerment

Economic independence is essential for gender equality. Girl-led movements can promote financial literacy programs, entrepreneurial initiatives, and advocate for equal economic opportunities for women and girls. By focusing on economic empowerment, these movements can challenge the economic barriers that often limit the potential of girls, particularly in rural areas where access to financial resources is limited. Many girl-led networks and initiatives lack legal status and financial resourcing to function as regular registered organizations which becomes a challenge for them to access funding and resources from other stakeholders.Therefore, more flexible and sustainable long-term funding can provide girl-led networks and initiatives to continue their activism and work at the grassroot level.

7   Creating Safe Spaces for Girls to Lead

A crucial aspect of promoting gender equality is providing girls with the spaces and opportunities to lead. Girl-led movements should create safe, supportive environments where girls can speak freely, share their ideas, and take on leadership roles. These safe spaces can be physical (such as community centers or youth groups) or virtual (online platforms) and should be designed to empower girls to become advocates for their rights.

8   Engaging Adolescent Boys as Allies

Gender inequality is not just a women's and girls's issue; it is a societal issue that requires the active participation of men and boys. Girl-led movements can engage male allies by organizing awareness campaigns, educational programs, and dialogues that promote the importance of gender equality. By working together with adolescent boys, girl-led movements can help challenge harmful gender stereotypes and create a more inclusive, supportive environment for all genders - a generation that lives by feminist principles and supports equality.

By adopting these recommendations, girl-led movements in the Asia-Pacific region can catalyze meaningful progress toward achieving gender equality. Through digital activism, community engagement, policy advocacy, and education, young girls can shape a future where they are equal participants in society and leaders in their communities.

CHAPTER 14:
CONCLUSION

The findings and recommendations from this consultation process underscore the **critical role of adolescents and youth, particularly girls, in advancing gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region**. From the power of **social media** as a tool for advocacy to the essential need for adolescent and youth representation in decision-making, the insights reveal a strong call for action. Girl-led movements, through grassroots initiatives, digital advocacy, and strategic partnerships, can serve as powerful drivers of change, challenging deeply entrenched societal norms, breaking down barriers, and creating opportunities for young girls to lead.

The research highlights the importance of focusing on evidence-based strategies, as research continues to play a pivotal role in advocating for gender equality. It emphasizes the need for resources, both financial and institutional, to support youth-led initiatives and to ensure that young voices are heard and valued at all levels of governance. Furthermore, the findings shed light on the necessity of breaking down economic, social, and cultural barriers to ensure that all girls have access to education, leadership opportunities, and equal recognition in all spheres of society.

The findings also demonstrate the transformative power of community action. While 31% of respondents advocated for local initiatives, it is clear
that grassroots movements are pivotal in driving the global gender equality agenda. The engagement of men and boys as allies, alongside empowering girls and young women, creates a more inclusive approach that challenges harmful stereotypes and promotes sustainable change.

Ultimately, this study calls for a concerted effort to support girl-led movements through the provision of resources, platforms for leadership, and opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration. By prioritizing adolescent and youth involvement, challenging discriminatory norms, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities, we can collectively foster a future of gender equality and empowerment. As the Asia-Pacific region continues to face complex challenges, girl-led movements remain central to ensuring that gender equality is not only achieved but sustained.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Malaysia
2. Papua New Guinea
3. India
4. Japan
5. Vietnam
6. Sri Lanka

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

1. Daren Paul Katigbak, Philippines (Board Member, IPPF)
2. K.Yogeshwary, Sri Lanka (Gender Manager, Institute of Social Development)
3. Phillie Julai, Papua New Guinea (Member, Generation Equality Youth Task Force - UN Women Initiative)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CASE STUDY 01

UNCONSCIOUS BIASES, HARMFUL ATTITUDES AND GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN JAPAN

As a young woman pursuing a master's degree in Japan, I have faced numerous instances of gender-based discrimination, not only from society but even during opportunities meant to support academic growth. When I shared my academic achievements with others, I often heard, **"Once you get married, why would you need further education?"** These remarks diminished my pursuit of knowledge, as if my gender should limit my ambitions.

Even during a scholarship interview with an organization known for advocating human rights, I encountered unsettling attitudes. The interviewer remarked, "I don't think Japanese men are discriminating against women." Additionally, when I was interviewed for a research grant from the Japanese government, all the panelists were men. **One interviewer openly stated,**

日本

> **"I disagree with gender equality. So can you give us a legitimate reason to fund your research?"**

It was difficult to challenge such deep rooted views and negative attitudes towards a matter like gender equality. while needing their financial support.

These experiences highlight the pervasive nature of gender bias. Discrimination isn't only from strangers or interviewers-it also comes from friends. My female peers often questioned my future life plans, reinforcing stereotypes about women's roles. Gender inequality, deeply rooted in society, continues to affect women's academic and personal choices.

(FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION 04)

CASE STUDY 02

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In Papua New Guinea, conversations about sexual and reproductive health are often shrouded in discomfort and taboo. Within the family setting, discussing topics related to sexuality is met with hesitation and unease. This cultural sensitivity means that many parents avoid teaching their children about comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).
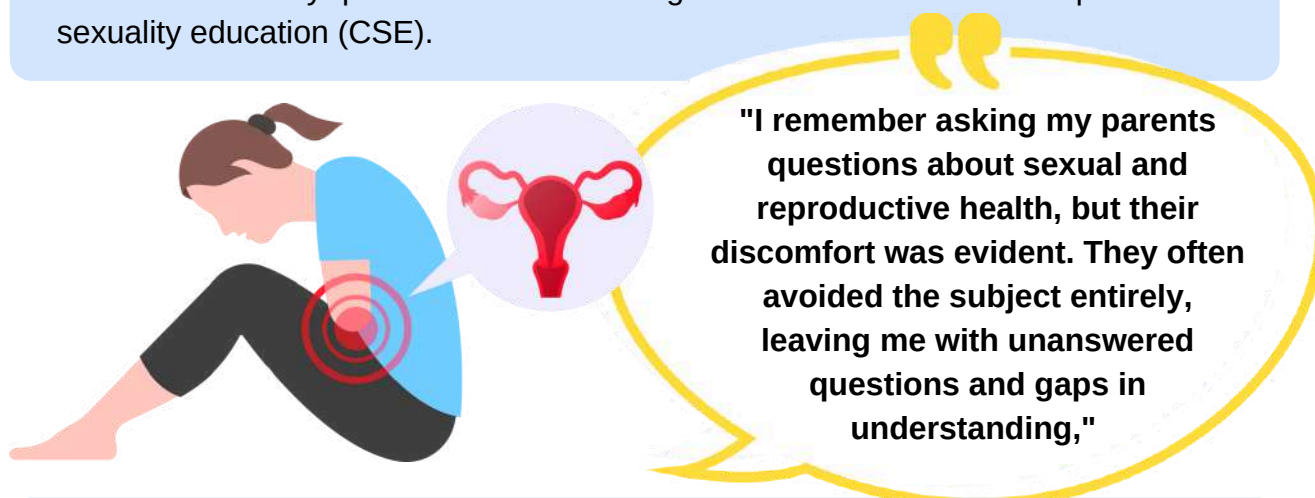
> "I remember asking my parents questions about sexual and reproductive health, but their discomfort was evident. They often avoided the subject entirely, leaving me with unanswered questions and gaps in understanding,"

The limited scope of education provided at schools further compounds the issue. **"What little we were taught focused only on the basics. There was no in-depth knowledge about contraceptives or how to care for one's sexual and reproductive health. This left many of us unprepared to make informed decisions about our bodies and futures."** Faced with these challenges, she turned to the internet for answers, seeking resources to learn what others were unwilling or unable to teach. **"It wasn't easy, but I felt I had no other choice. If I wanted to understand how to protect myself, I had to find the information on my own."**

The lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education has had significant consequences in the country, particularly for young girls. Many face unwanted pregnancies or contract sexually transmitted diseases due to a lack of awareness and resources. **"Sexual and reproductive health is an incredibly important topic here, but the barriers to accessing accurate, reliable education on the subject continue to harm us. If schools and families were more open to teaching comprehensive sexuality education, it could make a world of difference for so many lives."**

This story highlights the urgent need for culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, and accurate comprehensive sexuality education in Papua New Guinea. Breaking down these barriers can empower young people to make informed decisions, ultimately improving their health and well-being.

(FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION 2)

CASE STUDY 03

TECHNOLOGY FACILITATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN JAPAN

In Japan, the integration of advanced technology into daily life has brought numerous conveniences, but it has also given rise to darker realities, including **gender-based violence facilitated by technology.** One incident from a private high school in Japan vividly highlights this concern.

At the school, a few male students secretly installed a hidden camera disguised as a pen in the girls' swimming pool changing room. This deliberate invasion of privacy aimed to exploit technology for malicious purposes, leaving the victims traumatized and powerless to seek justice.

When the girls discovered the hidden camera, they reported the incident to the authorities, hoping for justice. However, the response they received was disheartening. Since the school was a private institution and not a public space, the police declared that no criminal charges could be filed against the perpetrators. The legal framework in place offered no protection for the victims in this context, allowing the boys to evade any consequences for their actions.

This case underscores the broader issue of how technology can be misused to perpetrate gender-based violence. The lack of robust legislation to address such crimes and the presence of legal loopholes exacerbate the problem. As technology continues to evolve, so do the methods employed by perpetrators, leaving victims increasingly vulnerable.

The incident serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive laws and policies to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Without such measures, countless individuals remain at risk, and perpetrators continue to exploit technological advancements to commit these heinous acts with impunity.

(FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION 04)

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