

Rejuvenate Dialogue
19th July 2022

Setting the scene

The fifth Rejuvenate dialogue was held on 19th July 2022. Five panellists working across contexts and themes joined the Rejuvenate team on a discussion on gender in child and youth rights. We asked speakers and participants to consider the following four questions:

- How does gender intersect with child/youth rights and participation?
- What kind of gender equality work is being done by/with children and young people?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of working at the intersection of gender, child rights and children/youth's participation?
- What work is not being done, and is needed?

Insights

[\(You can also watch the presentations on YouTube\)](#)

Co-Director of the project, **Vicky Johnson** (University of Highlands and Islands), began the dialogue by introducing the Rejuvenate project and reflecting briefly on the previous dialogues.

Raisa Philip and Mariah Cannon

Raisa and Mariah kicked off the dialogue with a discussion on a piece of work that they are currently undertaking with Tessa Lewin (Co-Director of Rejuvenate) on evidencing the impact of girl-led approaches. They brought out three key areas of tension and complexity they had encountered.

First, they discussed challenges in determining the scope of the project because of the fluidity of terms like 'girl-led' in practice. This led them to mining a wide range of interventions with girls and mapping them onto a spectrum. The spectrum indicated the roles girls play at various stages of set-up, implementation, and evaluation. Secondly, they discussed the fact that the projects along the spectrum were driven by varied objectives, theories of change, and methods of implementation. These variations led to varied evidence. Much of the evidence focussed on process not outcomes, calling into question what is considered as 'valid evidence'. Finally, they highlighted the challenges of interventions with girls' that attempt to address issues of gender inequality – such as anemia, GBV, or access to education – but are constructed within a gender binary which limits their capacity to achieve transformative gender equity.

They explained that part of the motive for this dialogue was to further explore more the contentions and complexities their initial research had uncovered and delve into the literature gaps through interviews and discussions with practitioners.

Taveeshi Gupta from Equipundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice

Dr. Taveeshi Gupta introduced Equipundo and explained the organisation's origin and evolution over the last 15 years – emphasising that in its most recent iteration the organisation has an intersectional focus on masculinity and social justice.



Equimundo

Equimundo – the Center for Masculinities and Social Justice is the next phase of Promundo-US, which grew out of Instituto Promundo in Brazil. Their new name – Equimundo – emphasises their focus on masculinities within and always as part of a social justice framework and communicates that message to a broader audience of stakeholders. Equimundo works to achieve gender equality and social justice by transforming intergenerational patterns of harm and promoting patterns of care, empathy and accountability among boys and men throughout their lives.

Taveeshi spoke of the inherent, hierarchical power dynamics within constructions of child, youth and gender that make imperative a critical analysis of their intersections, as she explains in the quote below:

*'Often we talk about child rights, and youth rights, and gender right as if they're kind of independent pillars. To me... just at its very core, child rights, youth rights, and even gender rights are really about power hierarchies and the way in which we kind of position certain groups' needs over others. So in that sense, today's dialogue is very critical because without acknowledging these power dynamics inherent within social constructions of gender or within the adult centric, you know how we dismiss child and youth rights, I just don't see how we can do good work, or make any kind of progress or really have an impact. So I just think it's just an important topic to talk about. When it comes to the intersections of gender and child rights to me **the first big question is – whose voices are we listening to?** Is it only girls when we want to, say, understand more about violence against women, do we focus on boys as well? So really thinking about whose voices are needed to holistically answer the question is really important.'*

Taveeshi continued by explaining the importance of critically engaging with gender when working with children. Children live gendered lives and therefore to not recognise or pay attention to gender is to ignore an essential determinant of their experiences and thus fail to allow for meaningful participation.

Taveeshi also challenged the dialogue participants to think about the tension between specificity and scaling up in participation with youth. Citing the example the development of [Programme H](#), which was based on engagement with young men in India, and then applied globally, she compared Programme H with a new project *Generation G* in Morocco. *Generation G* brings youth movement leaders and feminist activists together to build an intergenerational gender movement – giving opportunities for young people share their experiences. Taveeshi confessed that the collaboration may not work, but it does embrace intergenerational tension, and explores new ways of working.

Wadi Ben-Hirki, Founder and Executive Director of the Wadi Ben-Hirki Foundation

Next we heard from young, feminist leader Wadi Ben-Hirki who shared her personal experiences of intersectionality in her work in Northern Nigeria, and the challenges she has faced as a young woman leading her organisation. She also highlighted the contextual knowledge, experience and dynamism she is able to bring to her work as a young leader from Northern Nigeria.

Wadi underscored the importance of contextual determinants of inequality. She argued that meaningfully working with young women and girls depended on a range of factors that cannot be generalised across regions or even countries.

'When we work in the field, the way in which we are able to access and talk with young girls, you know, and adolescent girls is different from the boys because you know culture comes to play, religion comes to play, so many times gender is not a standalone thing. It intersects with culture, class, religion and many other factors that people don't necessarily always see'



Wadi Ben-Hirki Foundation

Wadi Ben-Hirki Foundation works across Nigeria to impact the lives of the less-privileged, marginalized, and disadvantaged through humanitarianism and advocacy. WBHF fights for the rights of girls to live and thrive and not just be seen as wives or property. They fight for the rehabilitation and empowerment of internally displaced persons, for policy reform, and for the Nigerian constitution to follow suit in ensuring that the protection of the rights of children, especially girls, becomes the new normal. They believe extreme poverty can be brought to an end, all children can be educated, all women can be empowered, and love can be shared even in the most adverse circumstances.

Next, Wadi spoke to the specific challenges of being a young female in Northern Nigeria working on issues of gender equity – from the criticism faced by her parents to the accusations that she would be unable to find a husband, to being used for tokenistic participation in adult-led initiatives. Wadi explained that building a sense of true agency is essential in the work that she does. She defined agency as participants ‘believ[ing] that they are a part of the process from the planning to project design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation, and even them pitching in and helping us to follow up’. Wadi underscored the importance of working closely with collaborators in-situ, whom Wadi called ‘ambassadors’, to facilitate sensitisation work with community gatekeepers in hard-to-access contexts.

Wadi ended her talk by emphasising the necessity of including young people in decisions which affect them and of prioritising local knowledge in context-based approaches which accounts for intersectionality.

Arundhati Sridhar, Gender at Work’s Feminist Youth Leadership Programme

Our last panelist, Arundhati spoke to us about Gender at Work’s new Feminist Leadership Lab and the discoveries and insights they gained while setting it up.



Gender at Work

Gender at Work is an international feminist network of individuals and organizations, located at the intersection of theory and practice, which works to end all forms of discrimination and advance cultures of equality, particularly gender equality. They work with individuals, grassroots organizations and institutions to carry out capacity building and organizational development, network building and collectivization, research and knowledge building. Guided by their belief that organizational transformation is key to advancing women’s rights, their change initiatives engage and negotiate with patriarchy, power and privilege to challenge socio-cultural norms, reduce Violence against Women and Girls, and drive progressive policy change.

Arundhati began by explaining the Feminist Leadership Lab’s first steps – which included a review of what youthhood, feminism, and leadership entails in an Indian context.

They were aided in this exploration by their reflective approach:

‘We went in with a lot of openness to being critiqued and a lot of openness to really reimagining and recasting everything, which is a huge luxury that a lot of programmes don’t have, but maybe what we’ve stumbled upon in the process is also helpful to everybody else.’

They discovered that they had to broaden their approach to 'literature' to include personal and organisational experience and to bring youth into the process of conceptualisation – which led them to realise that youth cannot be treated as a linear, chronological category. Rather, youthhood is situational – with individuals moving back and forth between childhood, youthhood and adulthood depending on context. This review led them to the three underlying principles of the Feminist Leadership Lab:

1. Meaningful youth participation as youth involved as co-creators, builders and agenda-setters;
2. Youthhood as a moving idea, which emerges from experiential sharing and is not assumed;
3. Leadership as collective and not individual.

Arundhati ended by critiquing 'universality', which she said not only obscures context but also loses the sharpness of politics. She argued that politics is crucial when working with young people.

Discussion

After the panellists finished their presentations, the dialogue opened into a discussion, taking questions and comments from participants and attendees and covering three main themes: legitimacy and space, supervision and/vs. support, gender binaries and interventions beyond sensitization.

Legitimacy and space

When working with children and young people, Laura Hughston highlighted the challenge of ensuring legitimacy in participation – making sure that it is not limited to a small number of individuals but instead inclusive and representative of the wider community of girls. This challenge was noted by Tessa in the chat, who explained that the Rejuvenate project had paid specific attention to this in their literature review. Mariah added that one of the emerging findings was that projects which engage girls in meaningful participation often create spaces for collective action.

Supervision and support

Frank Banda emphasised that in his experience, what children and youth need to fully enjoy their right to participation is adequate supervision. He built on this suggesting that children and youth should be supported through skill development and education around the tenants of governance or understanding their own rights. This related closely to the [Rejuvenate principle of support](#).

Gender binaries

Next, Erin O'Neill, MA Gender and Development student at IDS, reflected on the tension between doing work with girls and not reinforcing the gender binary or invisibilising people of other genders. Arundhati responded by explaining the work that the Feminist Leadership Lab is doing around the idea of feminists across all genders. She advocated for programmes including more trans and non-binary voices to challenge power in strategic ways. She further encouraged more critique of the assumption that all women-led work is on gender, and that all women-led work is feminist.

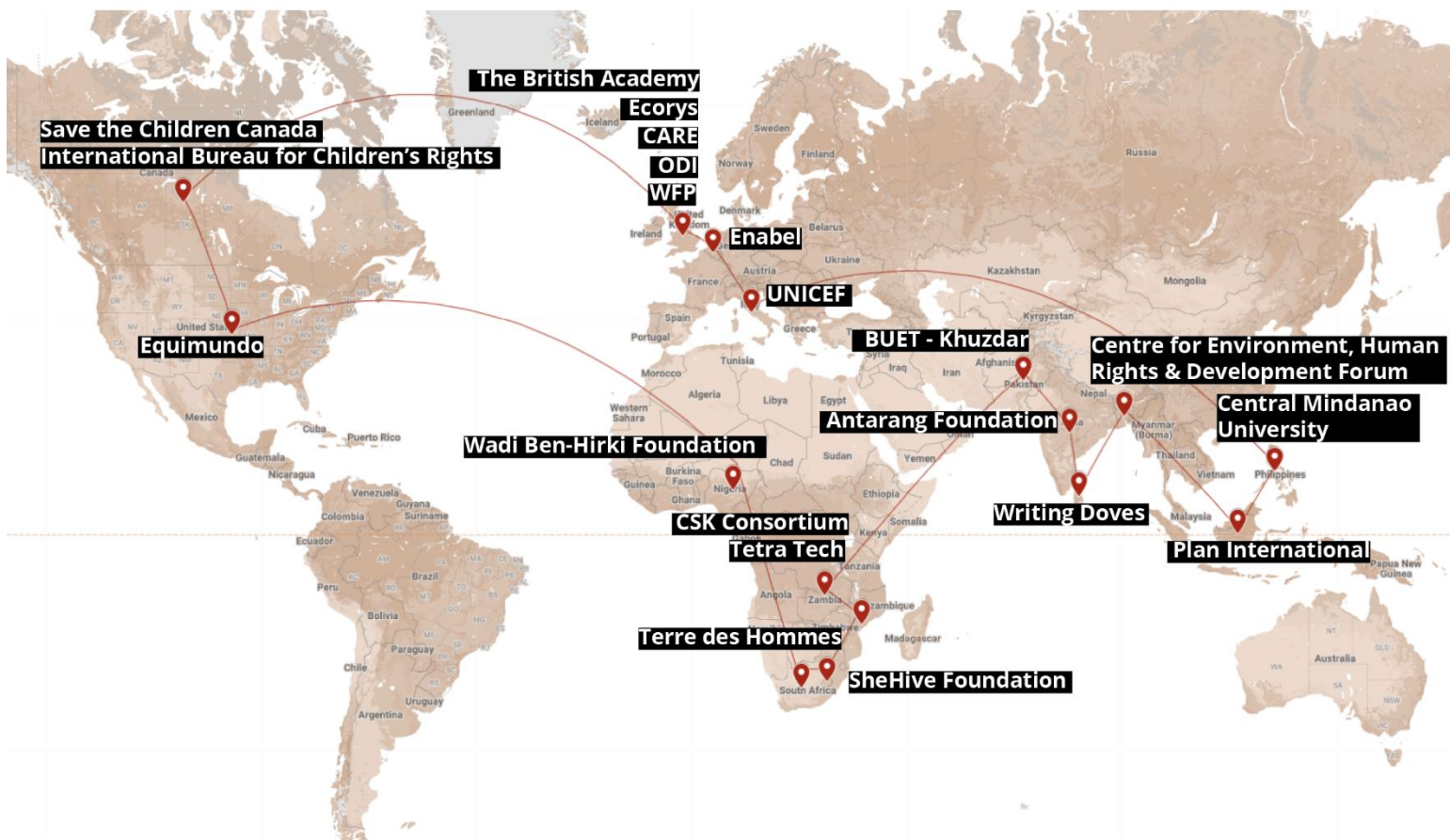
Interventions beyond sensitization

Both Ornella Atangana and Seabata Makoe asked about the barriers in the environment, such as social norms and patriarchal practices, in which gender work is undertaken and how this often hinders work to address youth-related, age-related or gender-related inequalities. Taveeshi advocated for addressing the social construction of gender and working across all levels – teachers, parents, coaches, healthcare workers, etc and to 'listen to the boys and men but not without the voices of the women'. She also underscored the tensions between scaling up and losing the specificity needed to holistically address contextual social norms.

This brief summary cannot encapsulate all the individual contributions made in the lively discussion and the Rejuvenate team invites those who watch the dialogue and read this summary to continue these discussions within your networks and the growing Rejuvenate network.

Building connections

Attendees included adults and youth researchers from across the globe in conversation with a range of decision makers and funders. Organisations can be seen on the map below.



Source: Map data ©2022 Google, INEGI

Continuing the conversation

Blogs – REJUVENATE keep conversations around child and youth rights going through regular [blogs](#). If you have an idea for a blog, please do [get in touch with one of the REJUVENATE team via our website](#).

Explore and submit to our [Living Archive](#) – a collection of organisations, projects and resources all focused on child and youth rights and participation. We've included some examples in boxes in this paper. If you have an item you think others in the field can learn from, please [fill out our submission form](#).

Report DOI: [10.19088/REJUVENATE.2022.004](https://doi.org/10.19088/REJUVENATE.2022.004)