

Panel: Women issues remain at the forefront

Experts: Women who are most in need and hardest to reach



(Panelists left to right: Pari Ibrahim, Laurie Adams, Jennifer Windsor, Donald Steinberg and Malika Saar)

Despite efforts to reach women globally about health care, education and political involvement, some geographic groups remain out of reach, experts said at a Washington, D.C. panel on Wednesday.

Women particularly in the Middle East and Africa are not easily reachable to be able to receive assistance said Jennifer Windsor, senior advisor with the CSIS Project on Prosperity and Development.

“It’s the poorest women and conflict-affected countries that we really need to focus on to make sure they don’t slip through the clouds,” she said.

Sponsored by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), the panel, "Breaking Silos: Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals," featured four experts with international human rights experience.

Laurie Adams, president of Women for Women International, a nonprofit that helps marginalized women in developing countries, find new ways to reach a wider demographic to help more women.

“We are a tiny organization and we can’t obviously reach the millions that are in need of this approach,” she said.

She said that some societies are harder to get through due to social or religious beliefs imposed by the environment they live in.

“Social empowerment is one of the important factors and changing social norms and people's beliefs is hard sometimes,” Adams said.

Pari Ibrahim, founder of the Yezidi Foundation, talked about her concerns about the leaders in developing countries concealing information. They don’t want the wrongdoings done against women to be disseminated, therefore, will find a way to block any form of communication, including shutting down the internet.

“There were 21 men killed and 16 women kidnapped in my family, but I did not hear or see anything about it in the news,” she said referring to the ISIS attacks on the Yezidi population in last August.

Ibrahim started her nonprofit shortly after the attack with hopes to help her people and others in need in the Middle East. She has received funding and partnered with WfWI to spread more awareness.

“We need to rebuild our communities and strengthen them for women. They are vulnerable, especially in the Middle East because it’s a men’s world,” she said.

The violence against women is kept hidden and women don’t have a way to have their voices heard in those developing nations.

According to Malika Saar, Google’s Senior Council on Human Rights, technology is the best way to raise awareness and help those women in need.

Having worked in an NGO for almost 15 years, Saar said; “We have to get more NGO’s to be more tech savvy and my hope is to connect human rights defenders with our products team at Google.”

NGO’s might be limited to certain help they can offer due to lack of access. “Once we connect the dots between the NGO’s space and tech space – we can really start making progress,” Saar added.

She explained that smartphones alone can do wonders in terms of disseminating global information. She believes that keeping quiet can encourage isolation and invisibility among women.

“Technology can help interrogate and surmount that silence. Because of these tech devices we can bear witness to a human rights violation,” said Saar.

Saar said use of virtual reality can be helpful to change perceptions and better situations for women. She talked about the google cardboard that can be put on the face to get a sense of how certain environments look and feel like in 3D.

Recently, experts had used the device to get a feel of solitary confinement. That experience has changed lawmakers’ perspective on incarcerating 16 to 18 year olds according to Saar.

“In a similar manner, there are opportunities to use these tools in our case as well. That might change perspectives,” Saar said.