

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR

ENSURING YOUNG MOTHERS RETURN, REMAIN, AND LEARN IN SCHOOL

Washington, D.C.
Wednesday, March 23, 2022

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Welcome and Moderator:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Okay. We still have some people joining in from the waiting room, but I would like to welcome everyone to the first Echidna Scholar's dialogue, "Ensuring Young Mothers Return, Remain, and Learn in School."

My name is Jennifer O'Donoghue and I'm a fellow at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings as well as the coordinator of the Echidna Global Scholar's program.

Today we're kicking off the Echidna Scholar dialogues in girl's education. A new initiative of the Echidna Scholar alumni network that aims to provide an ongoing space for girl's education researchers, practitioners, policymakers and advocates to engage in evidence informed conversation around pressing issues related to girl's education and gender equality in low- and middle-income countries.

Our plan is to host these events quarterly and our hope is that they be interactive sessions that bring together a mix of perspectives from across the world. One of the strengths of the Echidna Scholar alumni network is the diversity of experience and focus of our 33 alumni scholars working in 20 different countries.

Another is the commitment that they demonstrate daily to the cause of improving the lives of girls and young women in and through education. Today we hope to amplify that by joining with all of you to share what we have learned and to learn with you from the diversity of your own experiences and perspectives and the passion that you bring to our common cause.

Our agenda for this half hour is as follows. First you will hear from four of our Echidna Scholars, Christine, Dasmine, Maria Cristina and Nasrin who will set the stages for our conversation today sharing with us the situation on the ground in Uganda, Jamaica, Mexico and Bangladesh, respectively.

We will break this up a bit with some panel exercises to bring you all into the conversation. And then we will move onto a Q&A session with the panelists where they will

be able to go a bit deeper in response to your questions. After this, we will move into breakout rooms to hear more from all of you and then return to share some of the highlights of our conversations and close out the workshop together.

We just want to remind you of a few housekeeping points before we get started. We are recording the session, and we will be posting it to the Echidna Scholar's event page where it will be available to the public. So please know that your participation in this workshop today will be public.

We ask that you please keep yourself muted until the breakout portion of the workshop. And if you want to ask a question, please type your name, your question and who your question is for in the chat box. And if you want to comment on this conversation in social media, we invite you to do so using the #Echidnadiologues. And I think we will be pasting that hashtag into the chat for you so that you can just copy it from there if you want to.

Before we move onto our first presentation, we would like to get a better sense of who's in the room with us today? So to do that we're going to do a few quick polls. And so, the first poll question is just asking where you are joining us from today? What region of the world are you in? Is it early morning? Is it afternoon? Is it evening? Is it late night where you are? So go ahead and let us know.

And I will wait until we have about 70, 75 percent of people responding and then share that with all of you. So we're getting there. We're at about 42, 45, 50. I apologize for my scratchy voice this morning. I'm recovering from being sick. So okay. People are continuing to respond in this poll. We'll take about another maybe 10 seconds. We're up to 65. Getting close to that 75 percent mark.

Okay. If you haven't answered yet, please do so now in the chat to let us know where you're joining us from. Okay. I think I will go ahead and end our poll now and share with you the results. It looks like we have -- I think the majority of people from this last category which is the unnamed category. So most people it seems maybe don't want to put

themselves into one of these other groups. But then we have about a quarter of us joining from sub-Saharan Africa. Also, from South Asia, from Europe and Central Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. So it's good to see that we have a good diversity geographically here in our conversation.

And then want to share the second question with you which is around how you would define your primary role in relation to today's topic. So I know that many of us play multiple roles. But here I would ask that if you had to identify one that is your primary role what would that be? So go ahead and take some time to answer that question for us quickly.

And this one is moving up fast. We're already at 50 percent. So again, I'll wait until we get to about 75 percent before sharing. And it's great. I know you all can't see it moving here but I can. And it's great to see that we do have a good diversity of roles that people have in relation to the topic of teenage pregnancy.

Okay. I'm going to go ahead and end this poll as well. And share the results with you and you can see that we do have most of us here have a primary role as practitioners, but also a good portion of us are researchers, advocates and funders and also something else. And so, again that is exactly what we're looking for in these conversations is to bring together people from diverse perspectives and have this conversation together.

So I will stop sharing that and we will move onto our presentation. So our first panelist is joining us today from Uganda. Christine Apiot who is Education Programme Manager at Cotton on Foundation.

MS. APIOT: Thank you, Jen. And good morning, good afternoon to everyone.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Welcome, Christine. Let me read just quickly your bio and then I'll turn the mike over to you just so everyone has a better sense of where you're coming from.

Christine has been working in education programming agencies over the

past 20 years and has played a central role in placing critical gender and education issues on the policy agenda in Uganda. Her research as an Echidna Global Scholar at Brookings in 2016 and subsequent leadership was key to the adoption of national policy that supports senior women teachers as gender equity professionals in schools across the country.

Christine works closely with the gender unit of the Ministry of Education in agencies like the Forum for African Women Educationalists, FAWE, Uganda of which she is a member to support and develop guidelines that mainstream gender issues into education nationally and regionally. She holds a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in development studies. Welcome, Christine. And now over to you.

MS. APIOT: Thank you, Jennie. I'll be discussing (inaudible) to mothers in Uganda as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teenage pregnancies have been a major health and social person in Uganda for some time. Trends have shown that the percentages of young girls age 15 to 19 who have given birth or who are pregnant their first child was around 31 percent in 2001. And it rose to 55 percent in 2006.

It then went down a bit to 25 percent in 2011 and then back up in 2016 to 25 percent, but with the onset of the pandemic and when we had schools closed for two years in Uganda, the teenage pregnancies have rose once again to 31 percent and even probably more.

What impacts these rates of teenage pregnancies in Uganda? You find that the proportion of teenage girls age 15 to 19 who have begun childbearing decreases with increasing education and wealth. You'll find that approximately 47 percent of from peasant subsistent families and communities and that 27 percent of the rural girls are more likely to have begun childbearing before their counterparts in urban centers who are about at 19 percent.

Teenage childbearing also varies according to regions in Uganda where we have different tribes and cultures with the percentage of 16 to 17 in the southwest and central region versus 30 to 31 percent in the north central east and west where bride price

really matters. Childbearing also increases dramatically with age, rising from 3 percent in the girls of approximately 15 to 54 percent at 19 years of age.

Government has also done something to try and stop this trend. Parliament in 1990 passed a law to criminalize sexual relations between men and girls below the age of 18 making the affairs of the defilement at a much similar penalty of life imprisonment for the culprits. Government through the means of education has also put out a guideline that implements the roles and responsibilities of the senior man and senior woman in schools. This rule particularly supports retention and completion most of the girls in schools.

The most recent of the guidelines that Ministry has put out is one of prevention and management of the teenage pregnancies in the school setting. These particular guidelines were revised to have the aspect of reentry included.

What are the barriers in policy and practice? You'll find that research done before the COVID pandemic showed that there were a number of teenage pregnancies due to economy, social and cultural realities that have, for example, rendered the laws in applicable. You find the culprit. He's able to negotiate with the victim's parents and get away with it.

On the other hand, government and also the churches, advocate for abstinence only and do not give a choice of birth control and condoms to the youth. With the onset of the pandemic, the already vulnerable girl's plight has expanded and deepened because of economic hardships.

Some experts on the other hand, blame this on the poor parental care and lack of it due to the moral cultural and the social values in society. All is not lost. We still can support these girls. Government needs to be tighter on their responses to the law. We can support teenage mothers with education, skills development, health services through a number of youth programs.

Government on the other hand, can give the youth choices in terms of abstinence, birth control and use of condoms. There also has to be a new shift in culture

and religion to be more accommodating of the teenage mothers. But all in all, we have to work together as a community, since gets (inaudible) and engage on various activities. Take up various roles and responsibilities towards the youth of this era. Thank you very much. Over to you, Jen.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Christine. That was really a comprehensive, but I would say brief but comprehensive overview of some of the challenges in the current work that's being done in Uganda. And we look forward to hearing from you in the question-and-answer period. I just want to encourage everyone to please drop any questions that you may have for Christine in the chat now. And for our other presenters throughout the workshop.

Our next presenter today joins us from Jamaica. Dasmine Kennedy has work spans approximately 30 years in the field of education both at the classroom and policy levels. Her research and leadership has been instrumental in ensuring systemwide improvement in educational access, quality, equity and inclusion in Jamaica. As an advocate for change and based on research she did at Brookings as an Echidna Global Scholar in 2017, Dasmine spearheaded the development of a national policy to support school aged mothers through mentorships, scholarships and the establishment of a 21st century daycare facility to enable quality care for the children of young mothers.

After working as an assistant chief education officer at the Ministry of Education and Youth in Jamaica where she was responsible for education planning and development in 2020, Dasmine was named acting regional director with administrative responsibilities for approximately 160 education institutions and over 6,000 educators serving education from the pre-primary to secondary levels. Welcome, Dasmine.

MS. KENNEDY: Thank you, Jen. Good morning all. I am Dasmine Kennedy, former Echidna Global Scholar from the 2017 cohort. And I focused on the reintegration of teenage mothers in the form of education system in Jamaica.

It is somewhat preliminary to make a definitive statement of the trend and/or

impact of the pandemic on teenage pregnancy in Jamaica. For one, formal data is not yet available but there are vary data sources to include data collected from schools and health centers which need to be integrated to provide a definitive position.

However, the data suggest prevalence in the 16 years and 17 to 19 age cohorts. And another mitigating factor is that online schooling has also masked the real numbers. The data will show that girls from low fourth year economic background are mostly impacted and here there is limited access to virtual classes. And there's also increased exposure to emotional and sexual abuse due to inadequate supervision.

But what are the barriers to policies and practice? These indeed stand in the way getting girls back in school and learning in spite of the fact there is a national policy for their reintegration. There is reluctance of some school administrator, we call them principals in Jamaica. In readmitting adolescent mothers in the former school system.

And, of course, they cite spacing limitation which still remains a challenge today. There is inflexibility with formal admission period. And when the girls are ready to be reintegrated. Formal admission period is normally between September and November. Sometimes, the girls need to get back to school before that time.

Removal from social protection program base and (inaudible) records to reflect that they are pregnant and lactating mothers is also a barrier. And finally, nonsupport on the part of some parents and their guardians remain a critical issue.

But how do we support these girls in spite of all these many challenges here? Yes, the girls are still in need of adequate psychosocial and family support. And there's always a need for financial support. We find that this to be a very challenging issue. But in spite of support already being provided, there are still missing links.

And they include ramping up positive parenting and childrearing practices as well as, you know, lobbying for parenting and family support to gender empowerment of the young ladies. Constant support as frequently the status of the girls is kept as a secret in their educational context. Nobody wants anybody to know that they have the girls that they

are affecting. And also, childcare support when the girls return to school.

Finally, there's a lot of interest on the part of some adolescent mothers to complete their educational pursuits in spite of available resources. I will say that while significant strides have been made to reintegrate school age mothers in the former school system in Jamaica there remains some critical barriers to the access of many. These must be addressed with (inaudible) to ensure equitable access to quality education. And I thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Dasmine. Again, I know these are quick sort of presentations through the work that you all have been doing and what you have been seeing on the ground. But I think you did a great job of highlighting for us some of the current issues that you and your colleagues in Jamaica are working on to ensure that girls can return to and learn in school.

We're going to take a break from presentations for a second and I would like to share my screen. We're going to try use Padlet here, which I have to say for me is a new experience. So we'll see how we go. And let me just try to share my screen here quickly. I think that a link has been put into the chat. So if you look and use that link in the chat to go to the Padlet. We have a few questions there on the Padlet that we would like to hear from all of you.

So if you could first let us know what organization you're joining us from so we can continue to get a sense of who all is in the room with us. And second, what is something from these first two presentations from the cases of Uganda or Jamaica that you heard that might really resonate with you? Or sort of a key takeaway? Something that you're thinking about after those first two presentations? That would be great.

And then the third question here is about sharing resources. So if you have time now and you have sort of a resource that has been really important to you in terms of something you found helpful in thinking about your own work on this topic. And, you know, it might be a book or a podcast, an article, a video, et cetera. Something that you found

helpful that would be great. And we'll continue to try to add those resources as we go on.

So just to get a look of where people are joining us from. We have people joining us from Care International based in (inaudible) and based in Portugal. From My Emotions Matter in Nepal. From Learning Support in Education from Mentor Together. I recognize a lot of these organizations and can imagine the people who are writing us. So welcome to all of you. Applitune, Acsan, Casey Family Program, Save the Children, Cottonon, World Vision, International Youth Foundation, FAWA Uganda, UNICEF in the Eastern Caribbean.

Glad to see, you know, such a broad representation of organizations and of countries around the world that are working. And in terms of thinking about what's resonating with people. You know, to understanding the context in Uganda. Seeing similarities between what's happening in Jamaica and also in Temorles. Similarities again with countries that girls are at risk for abuse in times of COVID-19. Feeling the emotion and the lack of support for these young women. And I wonder what is known about that academic achievement in primary.

That's something we can carry in maybe to the panelist conversation. And again, the similarities between Uganda and Jamaica. And the same challenges continuously facing young girls despite all the work that has been undertaken. I think that is something that will continue to come out as we see the presentations.

And for people who are putting resources, for example, who put statistics from our health department. It would be wonderful if people could share links with us as well so that other people could go in and be able to take a look at these resources as well.

So I'm going to stop sharing. We'll return to the padlet. Please feel free to continue writing in the padlet at any time. And we're going to jump back over to our next presentations. But again, we'll return to that padlet and use it at other moments throughout our workshop today.

It is now my pleasure introduce María Cristina Osorio Vázquez who's joining

us today from Mexico. As a professor and research fellow over the past 24 plus years. María Cristina has led several projects on women's economic empowerment and authored research papers focused on the advancement of women's and indigenous people's participation in education, business and politics in Mexico as a way to create equal opportunity for all.

Her research has Brookings as a 2017 Echidna Global Scholar focused on addressing the challenges and barriers to girl's education in Mexico. Particularly from Mayan girls living in remote areas of the Yucatán Peninsula. Upon completion of her residency period at Brookings, she undertook a research project to reintegrate out of school adolescent Mayan girls into the national education system.

She is currently working on developing strategies to promote school retention and reintegration of girls living in marginalized context in the Yucatán Peninsula supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. María Cristina over to you.

MS. VAZQUEZ: Thank you, Jen. Thank you for the inclusion and the opportunity to present my research advances. These research was available through the support of the Echidna giving from 2018 to 2020.

The Mayan communities in the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico. That means that during the last months of research, the COVID-19 pandemic hadn't really started in the area. It was found that in tourist communities adolescent years face challenges related to high levels of poverty, distance from learning centers, gender norms and linguistic (inaudible).

In this region, gender norms limit or prevent disclosure of (inaudible) in the family leaving girls unprotected against no consensual sexual relations, sexually transmitted disease and early pregnancies. In some families, prevails the domestic violence. Alcohol and drug addiction which drive adolescent girls to run away from home.

Some of the girls who participated in this project were rejected by teachers or having children or living with their boyfriends. They were told that they were a bad

influence on the girls attending the school even though they were minors. And they had not completed basic education.

However, in the small communities, adolescent years do not require (phonetic) them, due to the fears that their parents will find out that they are sexually active. It should be mentioned that there are governments who put programs for years in these communities to continue students. However, the community standards (phonetic) are not appropriate to the context.

When a girl begins her sexual life or gets pregnant before marriage, in some cases, the perception of shame is so strong in these communities that it drives parents to expel them from their homes as a punishment. When this happens, it is very difficult for the girls to continue schooling since the shelters and daycare centers are available in the cities. As a society, we need to accept that sexual activity initiates student of adolescence in Mexico, not only in the city but also in total communities. Therefore, it is imperative to enforce sexual education in school to complement the information received at home. It is important to promote the support that girls who receive from their families, partners, teachers and community when facing challenges at such a young age.

Finally, I would like to thank Akin Nagibi (phonetic) and the Alexander Yakumo (phonetic) Foundation. Thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Maria Cristina, again, for -- I know these are quick presentations, but really providing us a look into some of the challenges but also the important work that you've involved with, and others, to support young mothers in Mexico; and we have some great questions coming in in the chat; and just want to remind everyone, again, please drop any questions that you have. We have one more presentation and then we'll move on to the question-and-answer period. So, it's great if you can drop in your questions now.

Our final presenter joins us today, this evening that is for her, from Bangladesh. Nasrin Siddiqa has worked for 22 years in schools and NGOs to promote

gender, equity, and access to quality education in Bangladesh, focusing on barriers to girl's education such as child marriage and gender violence. In 2010, Nasrin founded the Education and Cultural Society, ECS, where she currently serves as president and executive director. ECS' five-step project to expand rural girl's access to standard education has established hundreds of STEM clubs in rural Bangladeshi schools and trained nearly 2,000 teachers to create gender-sensitive classroom environments. As a Echidna Global Scholar in 2019, Nasrin used this practical experience to document the specific barriers to STEM education faced by rural girls. Nasrin has been recognized by the U.S. Department of State and the Global Digital Annual Women's Economic Firm, among others, for her work with girl STEM education. She also serves as a consultant for the South Asia Chapter of the World Bank. Nasrin, welcome, and over to you.

MS. SIDDIQA: Thank you Jenn. Hello, everyone from around the world. So, you can see a photo here. This is not a photo from Goggle. She used to attend one of the learning centers in Bangladesh where underprivileged children are getting support for food, education, rights against violence, and others. During this time of COVID-19 pandemic, her poor mother was bound to marry off this 13-year-old daughter, and now she's holding her baby daughter leaving school along with all her hopes. It is a matter of great shock and failure that we could not rescue thousands of girls from dropout and due to this unprecedented pandemic, along with other existing failures.

Yes, we can see here that we are finding multiple disciplinary effect of COVID and need more extensive deep-rooted research to get to the real scenario. COVID-19 has a significant implication of livelihoods of women and transgender people in Bangladesh as 91.8 percent of the total employment of women is in the informal sectors. Domestic workers, owners, workers in medium and small enterprises, day deliverers, street vendors, cleaners, and most of the regiment gathering this tri-sector (phonetic), this is the most important formal sector, they had left their job already -- and many are returning, but this is a great loss.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the COVID-19, women on average profiting 2.40 percent as forty times more unpaid domestic work than men. The closure of schools and inter-family staying at home has further exacerbated that burden of unpaid share work on women. Release of (inaudible) Bangladesh say despite significant progress in recent years, (inaudible) for high-speed violence of child managing the world, COVID-19 compounds the difficult dispersing millions of girls. School closure, isolation from friends and stuff were near to us and rising poverty less the scars have heightened risk of child marriage.

So, girls should remain in school after returning. In order to check long-time dropout, government should collect gender disaggregated (phonetic) data on (inaudible) and what with schools should give action plans to bring back the girls to education. While timing for the resumption of schools, government, and iron shields, that other sectors, and schools have a stake hold that should either defy and denote any degradation policies that may discriminate against girls, such as not allowing married and pregnant girls to school.

To support re-enrollment means choice (phonetic) of health education should work together and coming to get well-defined time lasting (phonetic) peer benchmark and standards to the open schools. Special financial separate program is needed. Studies shows that cash jump spar coming into education program and waiving examination fees, the effective strategies for enticing girls, the enrollment, and staying at school.

So, in this slide, we can see how a nursery teacher takes care of a newborn child when her teenage mother completes her examination. We salute these teachers, and they're also suffering after this COVID-19 for different reasons. This might be an immediate or emergency solution, but it is not the sustainable solution. So, what we need? We need alternative backers like informal education, opening schools in state of lockmen (phonetic) centers for this type of girls. Same ascribed the science technology in getting mathematics education along with manufacturing and design (inaudible) time would benefit any of them.

Typical and book age kind of education and training is always a proven

media of alternative education which can ensure and support these girls to get sustainable jobs. Learning with earning; and just like mine, ECS is supporting different projects while these girls are learning different skills which will help them to honor and support their families in the near future. So, skilled-based education is also required so that the girls and other children, they can face the (inaudible) revolution and occupationally challenge the future. So, we need to rethink, relearn, and de-unite with the suitable, sustainable, and safe education system for all children, especially for girls; and more specifically, specifically, for the vulnerable girls immediately. Thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much, Nasrin, again, for providing us with that quick but, I think, very clear on-the-ground perspective of what you're seeing in terms of the challenges but also the opportunities; and, again, the work that you've been doing with young girls in Bangladesh. So, at this point, that's the end of our quick presentations that we wanted to serve as sort of the basis for the rest of our conversation today.

I'd like to give a quick virtual round of applause to all of our presenters for that quick, but clear, grounding that they've given us. And once again, I would like us to return to our tablet where we have a few other questions. So, again, if people have resources, it's great to see that our people have been sharing some resources. The right to education index is here, statistics, various strategies can be utilized. Again, if you have resources, anything you've read, watched, listened to that has impacted your thinking, you can put them in here. It looks like maybe this is a resource as well, from the Casey Foundation.

And so, I wanted to move to this question around what resonates with you from the second round of presentations. Now, we've heard from four different countries, four different contexts. Are there things that people feel like are really coming out strongly for them from these four presentations? What would be some of those key takeaways that you would include there? And I'm just going to, in the meantime, go back to see some of these,

from the last round of presentations, people also talked about the need to reinforce policies, to minimize victimization of girls in school. That, in Nigeria, someone's writing that there's no readmission policy and stigmatization is a major problem. High cases of school dropout due to inner pregnancy in Namibia. Similarly, in that with the Neapolitan context, so again we're hearing from different context that are facing some of the same challenges and, you know, we have a mixture, I think, of countries where there are not enough policies and other countries where there are policies but maybe putting that policy into practice and having effective implementation of that policy is where the challenge is; and there is a long way to go for its effective change; and the importance of supporting juvenile mothers, again.

Okay, the need for gender, race, violence, mitigation, very true; you know, I think, something that several of the, you know, presenters have mentioned that we know is the case that often sexual violence is the cause, and sexual abuse, is the cause of teenage pregnancy in many contexts; and yes, definitely agree on this continued need for gender disaggregated data. So, I'm, again, going to stop sharing the tablet but please feel free to drop in your comments and thoughts on the tablet at any time, and would now like to move on to the question-and-answer period.

So, here we have again our four presenters, representing four different context and having worked in four different context; and in looking through some of the questions in the chat and also the comments on the tablet, you know, one of the main questions, I think, is in regards to policy. So, I think, you know, we have sort of on the one hand, you spoke a bit, I think, several of you to different policies that do exist to support young mothers in terms of their continuation with their schooling, but there's some questions around what is actually happening. So, what measures are government's actually taking to make sure that that policy, or those guidelines, in the case of Uganda, are moved into practice; and then a question around how can practitioners reinforce those policies. So, maybe Christine, since one of these questions was directed specifically to you, we can start with you; and, in particular, if you can talk around, you know, how are the guidelines in

Uganda are being put into practice. And so, what types of measures is government, but also practitioners and the practitioner candidates (phonetic) are taking to ensure that these guidelines are followed.

MS. APIOT: Thank you, Jenn. Yes, indeed the re-entry guideline has been well circulated, at least all of the stakeholders will directly bring (phonetic) support in this particular re-entry program of putting our whole efforts to ensure that all the processes are in place up to the school level to support these girls come back into school. But just as everybody else is pointing out, yes, the girls can come back into school but there are very many other issues that will not make them still come back into school. The stigma, yes, is still there but one of the things that has really come out so glaringly is where will they put their efforts when they come back to school. You'll find that there are parents who will be the first people to take up these efforts, are still tolling to fend for their family; and, in fact, then would cause them to have to stay back at home. So, there're still some unanswered questions to these policies that need to be ironed out. Thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Christine. Would another of our panelist like to jump in on the same question around, you know, what do you see that has been actively happening in terms of policy implementation, an effective policy implementation, and how can practitioners get involved in that, in particular.

MS. KENNEDY: Okay; if I may, Jenn. Thank you for that question. I must say that the policy is well written, the document is there; yes, and implemented and very much on the way; but then when it gets down to the different context on framework, then therein lies the challenge. For example, yes, the scope is there for the girls to return to school, but Jamaica is a highly religious country and many of our institutions, educational institutions, were founded by private partners who are, themselves, high religious persons. So, in terms of having the status quo being upheld in institutions, there are tight rules. You may hear me refer to the fact that even though the scope is of the (inaudible), having girls to return to the school system, they are in the schools and we would have provided the support

of the guidance counselors and the social workers to enable their educational continuation; but many of the times, these practitioners are not aware that the girls are there; they don't know who they are because they're kept under a protective shield. Based on the fact, thought unfair, that if other girls know who they are, then there might be some complaining to their parents and then you have parents calling up at the regional office to report and to put out a case that how is it that they can invest in their daughters to go to a particular school and yet we have other persons within the same space who do not hold the same type of values.

So, it is not even political but it's more religious in my case; and as such you find that the girls are not benefitting from the support that are put in school for their fulfillment. However, all is not lost because within the regional authority, we have several (phonetic) in Jamaica, and I head one. We have guidance counselors who are all fitted in those centers. And they take an active role in visiting the girls when they are being re-integrated in their centers; they provide the requisite type of social support; they assist them with funding; and whatever they need because even in the pandemic period, my guidance counseling unit would have sourced technological devices to ensure that the girls could benefit, but this is not widespread. But you'd really want to have a growing swell of all these activities throughout the country, but how do you breakdown the stigmatization barrier is a key issue.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Dasmine; and, actually, I would like to build off the last part of what you said because we do have a question that came in around that as well. I think all of you talked about sort of the stigma issue and the sort of social norms and discrimination that can come with teenage pregnancy. So, the question we have here is how do you help young mothers deal with stigmatization and self-worth as they go back to school and when their friends and others may have moved on, for example. So, maybe, Maria Cristina, would you like to start off with this question. I know that some of the work that you've been doing have been specifically trying to get those social supports in

place for young mothers.

MS. VAZQUEZ: Yes; thank you, Jenn. Yes, it is very hard because, like I said before, if they get pregnant, they're going to be rejected by their family and that is the time when they really need support. We need to change this perceptual shame. We need to lay the field acceptance; that it is going to be all right; that there will to come a future. That is real important.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Now, there're ways that you've found to change that, some of the peer-to-peer work that you've been following?

MS. VAZQUEZ: That was really interesting because in the project, what I saw was that the girls that had support from their partners or family members, they finished secondary school, even with babies. But it was real important to have support of one member of the family, mostly the mother and also, if possible, the partner even if the partner is an adolescent as well. But, yes, I think that some of the students that they were making high rise school habilitation are related to that the importance of have a figure of support in your life when you are going through difficult experiences in life.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. Nasrin, would you like to jump in here at this point and talk about this work around stigma and social norms?

MS. SIDDIQA: Yeah, Jenn. Sure; thank you. That you've already (inaudible) has declared this is as generation (inaudible) when the school been opened after 18 months in Bangladesh, and in many parts of the world the situation is almost like that. So, many girls already lost their parents also due to this COVID-19. In my learning center, I know some of them that they have already lost their parents and it is impossible for them to go back. That's why we can see millions of children are now engaged with child labor and that starts the healing Bangladesh they are engaged with the work as housemaids, and we don't have any data or report that how many of them already left and who are they. So, actually, afterwards, we all need to agree with this that there is a (inaudible), something happened. Then we can move forward if we think that like previously, that everything is

okay if we just show some data and progress, that we did this is on the girl's side where it can (inaudible) but we have to know the hidden numbers that a real group is struggling. So, it is. And recently I found that some of the girls, they are really afraid of one of the girls; she is in Grade 9. After the school opening of about two years, she's still afraid of returning to school. She say that I can't (inaudible), just the school. I can't adjust to the mathematics situation of the subject, so I won't be able to go back to that school. So, that's why we are trying to support the mother who are widow, or divorcee, or that this young mothers with the smallest financial business and other things so that even if they can get minimum support to run their family so that they can send their children to school. So, we need more of a photo-check (phonetic). Thank you, Jenn.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. I think what you and Maria Cristina both spoke to is that need to not only support the girls themselves but also their families and others who are in their context so that they can support them better, right, and try to do some of that work that is related to that, sort of social stigma, in particular, and the need for social support.

I want to move on to another question here that we had around girl's access to comprehensive sex education; and, so, there's a question, you know, if each of you could address efforts that you've seen to provide adolescents with comprehensive sex education and whether, you know, there's been sort of pushback against that and how that has played out in different context; and I would just add into this question that, you know, with COVID, one of the findings in one of the challenges has really been that a lot of those types of supports and access to comprehensive sexuality, and sex education, and others has been interrupted because of the pandemic; but has the pandemic also opened up new opportunities? You know trying to look on the bright side a little bit. So, maybe, if each of you could talk about what you've seen in your countries in terms of comprehensive sex education in this past year or so, maybe, and what you think might be done? What are the possibilities moving forward? Who would like to start? Okay, Maria Cristina.

MS. VAZQUEZ: Hi, Jenn. In rural communities, it is also, like it is not existent inside the family. It is very rooted in cultural norms. So, even that it is happening, like I said in my presentation, that they begin to have sex around adolescence, around 15 years old, but even so their parents, they don't talk about it. So, it is only in the school that girls could have some information; but even so, like endurance (phonetic) here, it's like it is more common to see this kind of conversation and to have this open guidance in the school; but in in rural communities, it's also like non-existent. So, if the girl is not having the right information at home and the school is just as (inaudible), how's she going to know how to take care of herself? They're only relying like in another year, and a partner, also they don't have enough information; so it is an issue because it is happening but it's like nobody wants to talk about it in rural communities. It is, again, this perception of shame but in reality it is that if the girl don't have the information like she's going to be pregnant, and then she's going to reject that in school, and how we're going to solve this issue.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: I would also add -- just jump in here -- that part of the challenge in Mexico, in particular, is that parents are being given the choice of whether their children participate in comprehensive sex education, right. So that even when it's part of the national curriculum, parents can choose for their families to opt out of that, which adds and additional complication, right, in terms of young people's rights. Does anyone else want to jump in around this question?

MS. KENNEDY: I can comment, Jenn. I endorse another thing that Cristina would have mentioned; and as you rightly say, and within our context, sexual education is integrated in the curriculum, as well as the whole widening of platform for persons to access, you know, knowledge about sexual education. But then, again, it comes down, again, to the point where the rubber hits the road when the girl has to make the right decision. How do you strengthen that and, more so, in context where a girl needs to receive something from somebody to maintain survival? And then that person automatically becomes, you know, the person who will lead that young miss into compromising behavior. We do have an issue

of parental management to one parental guidance because if we take it now to a single family also, headed by a mother -- and it can also be headed by a father -- if there're not adequate supervision for that girl then the distraction would come about. We, in Jamaica, here, we have what we called a yard-to-yard initiative. And this came out of the fact that during the pandemic, we were unable to locate a number of our students. And then, when we started opening of school, we started collecting data on a weekly basis, and we look at it and were able to say how many children are still missing. And so, the Ministry invested in social workers, and we deployed the first of them to communities and it was found that many of the girls have not been able to return to school because they got pregnant, yeah? And this is evident and so, it's really holding on tightly to the social issues, which is going to take a whole lot of magnanimous (phonetic) work to get down to the level you meet that particular girl who is really in need. And sometimes, is not always easy. So, this is going to take a societal involvement, down to the churches level, down to the community level. And if we get to the stage where everybody looks out for our girl, then that we will find the greater impact happening.

But we have become so modernized in society, we tend to stay more in our homes and use the media. So, we are not actually drilling down into communities to see who needs help. And that is where society would have taken us at this point.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you. There are so many great questions and I know all of you have more that you want to say. I am going to move us towards the breakout room portion now, in particular, because I think many people are putting in the chat, ideas that they have as well. And so, this seems like a perfect opportunity and a perfect point at which to open the conversation and hear from and learn from the experiences of others who are on this call with us today. And in particular, Dasmine, building off of the last point that you made there, how can we build a sort of culture of support for, you know, for all young people but you know, in relation to the topic that we are discussing today, in particular, around young parents, really. Because

someone else had mentioned the role of boys and men in this, too. And so, how can we support young people in this way, and in this time, and make schools welcoming places and places where people are able to be themselves?

So, I am going to ask for help to move us all into the breakout rooms now. Each breakout room will have a facilitator who will be one of the five of us who have been moderating and presenting today. And we will just be there to help facilitate the conversation. And in addition to introducing yourselves in the breakout rooms, we have some questions for all of you that we would like to use to help to steer the conversation. So, I think our breakout rooms are underway, coming soon. And we will have about 20 minutes or so to work together in those breakout room spaces.

Or, as we did in our session, we got sort of talking still. So, I you know, unfortunately, we didn't have enough time to have the full discussion that we would like to have but I think that was really a first look, a first beginning of the conversation. And really, that is what this dialogue is all about, is starting the conversation and getting people together who are interested and who are working on this topic and who have experience and have great ideas and how do we lift up those great ideas and spread them around the world. And that's part of the conversation, the ongoing conversation that we hope that we will all be able to have.

We also worked on a collective document that will be a part of the Padlet (phonetic) and you will be able to see that as well, on the Padlet, and I think that the NRS just shared with us, the link to that collective document in the chat as well. So, that is a beginning way, again, to start to capture some of the ideas and the work experiences and the sort of thoughts and issues that everyone had. But at this point, I'd like to open the floor for our volunteer reporters to share some of the big-picture ideas that people talked about in the breakout rooms. And we will go in order of numbers here so we will start with Group 1.

So, if the reporter from Group 1 could unmute themselves and in about two minutes or less, briefly share a synthesis of the key points that you talked about in your

discussion, that would be great. So, who is our Group 1 reporter?

GROUP 1 LEADER: Hi. Hi, I am the group -- I --

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Go on.

GROUP 1 LEADER: -- I guess we were in breakout, yeah, hi. So, yeah, what we talked about, basically, was about the idea that in some countries, like this, particularly, this issue has been in a shadow. Even though that a lot of issues has been there, and we talk about gender, we talk about adolescent girls' education. But then somehow, we have missed talking about it and that we also experience, in some countries we also experience a lot of female students dropping out. In terms of like, the challenges and also, the solutions we -- there was a discussion regarding that. There are laws and policies when it comes to sexual and reproductive health education.

But then, some -- because of the lack of practical measures, that we have not been able to figure out. For example, the infrastructure related to (audio drop) even if the girls are pregnant, there are -- we are -- not be able to ensure that how they would be able to like, go to through the other problems, and other problems related to like, the reinforcement of laws. And the stigmatization is also one of the (audio drop) -- they really, the consequences are (audio drop) --

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Oh, no. Luanna (phonetic), I think we are losing the connection, unfortunately. So, I think we will move on to Group 2 and hope that Luanna is able to connect back with us soon. Is there a reporter for Group 2?

GROUP 2 LEADER: Yeah, sure, Jennifer, I will be summarizing our discussions in --

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Hey there.

GROUP 2 LEADER: Group 2, what we -- hi. What we deliberated on and during from building tomorrow, that is we work in Uganda. So far, like, Anne (phonetic) was actually, Sheryl (phonetic) now, was telling us this is a the -- we are in shadows trying to see how to best manage would-be help. So, we talked over what really happened in the two

years pandemic lockdown where we see perpetrators or abusers being those people -- these matters we are looking up to. So, these are the issues we experienced here. We looked at these matters being used for child labor as they were redundant (phonetic) and in the two years lockdown, they were taken down to do work, to do labor, too. This is how they kept across being challenges with the experience of getting pregnant. We looked at the pressure and the idleness (phonetic) at home, still, because the factors are to them being -- getting pregnant and also, looking at reinforcement of these policies. Of course, we have the policies in place, we have the guidelines, but how they are being reenforced. And also, that mindset, they are sharing -- they are changing the mindsets of the schools where these girls are going to be taken back to school. One of our group members in Nigeria had to submit that for them, they don't even have the reentry policy on these girls, so they are not given a chance to return to school. And yet, here in Uganda, the policy is there but also, the implementation of it still has a gap (phonetic), per the question.

So, we looked at loss of interest of these girls also, to return to school. Some of them don't want to go back to school. They have lost it, they want to go and start doing small enterprises, start entering to business and the economic world. So, we looked at other factors that are hindering this. We looked at the -- some of which is we can categorize in the religious aspect whereby some -- we had some were in even the -- one of our religious leaders saying we are not going to allow these girls back to school, or what -- if give back, too, they give to other fellow girls who did not conceive during the lockdown. So, all those are barriers and also, like we said economic factor, poverty, all these things.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Mm-hmm.

GROUP 2 LEADER: About coming to play to really give a stop to these girls which aren't in school. And how can we support this?

MS. O' DONOGHUE: Mm-hmm.

GROUP 2 LEADER: How can we come out as practitioners to support this? We looked at having our policies available but how are we going to scale them up? How are

we going to make them effective? And we looked at having parents involved if we can have any way of involving them. We can still give them financial trainings, economic trainings to support, be self-sustaining and support their -- these teen mothers.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Mm-hmm.

GROUP 2 LEADER: And also, looking up to these community structures and maybe, reenforcing and trying to work in collaboration with our local governments here to see that these polices are put into place and they are functioning. So that is -- that could be a summary of what our breakout room, in two, we --

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you.

GROUP 2 LEADER: -- discussed where, yeah, exactly, back to you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. Thank you so much, Doreen (phonetic). So, we will move on to Group 3, and again, I will ask, try to be brief. And also, if you could, try to build off of what you have heard from others so -- so we don't repeat and are building the story to be a bit bigger. So, a reporter from Group 3, if you want to, unmute yourself and come into the conversation here. And again, the brief version of what you talked about and something that you want to add to the conversation about what has already been shared. Do we have a reporter for Group 3?

MS. OSORIO VÁZQUEZ: No, Jen, we don't have it. But I can put a little bit if you want?

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Oh, okay.

MS. OSORIO VÁZQUEZ: So, if someone would like to do it as well, it's fine.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Why don't we -- well there, Maria Cristina, I am going to move on to Group 4 so that we can hear from Group 4 and then, we will come back to you. Just because I want to make sure that we have other voices in the conversation. Okay. So, reporter from Group 4, do we have a reporter from Group 4?

MR. FOWLER: We do. Hi, everyone, Zach (phonetic) Fowler (phonetic) here.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Hey there.

MR. FOWLER: There is a lot of things that have been said well already, so we won't belabor those points too much. I think a few key takeaways, obviously, major impact on girls' dropout and attrition related to COVID. I think one of the things that all of us have seen is a bit of a soul searching happening between different NGOs and institutions saying you know, are the participants that are working with, the communities we are working with truly as resilient to a crisis like this as we would want them to be? And if not, is there something we could be doing programmatically in the advocacy realm, in the policy realm, what can we be doing better? Because this did hit a number of regions, communities, countries even, significantly. And you have to wonder if the current practices are working if the effect was so dramatic.

I think something else we talked about too, is that there are a number of different barriers, I won't go into them again, I think people have covered that well, but one thing to point out about the barriers is that they are inherently holistic in nature, they -- it's not just one thing, right? It's layers, we know this well. I think to have a truly effective intervention, or a truly effective support system, you need to be thinking you know, systematically, you need to be thinking holistically, you need to be thinking about the whole-girl approach. And part of that also means that as we continue to investigate the barriers to school return, we need to be sourcing information from girls who are attempting a return themselves. So, you know, population-level data is very important, but so is individual qualitative data if we can get that from girls and get their own stories and voices, that is going to be key for us going forward to understand what are the issues from the people on the front lines, so to speak.

And then, lastly, in terms of what else is needed, I think one of the themes for us was really consistency. There are some national policies in some countries, in some other countries are looking for additional support from the government, additional support from policy. But I think in many context, even if there is a national policy supporting

pregnant mothers' return to school, there is not consistency in implementation or dissemination of that policy across the country. So, you might see strong implementation in the country's capital, but you might see more diffuse dissemination in the smaller communities in the kind of fringe of the country. And that is something for us to really think about.

I think also, there is consistency in messaging between different programs. Again, going back to the holistic issue, I shared an example of a family who was confused about the push reenroll pregnant mothers because they were also receiving information saying that pregnant mothers should stay home for a certain amount of time to finish breastfeeding and ensure the nutritional health of the infant and so, they are confused because they are getting the message of quickly get the girl back to school but also, don't quickly return the girl to school. So, the more holistically we can think about our approaches to why we are returning girls, when we return girls under what circumstances, the better off we will be. And a major part of our holistic look is going to be childcare. That is a major theme for all of us, I just wanted to name that because it came up again and again in our group. So, a quick overview there, but that's a summary of what we were talking about in Room 4.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: That's great. Thank you, Zach. So, we will move to Room 5, and I know from Room 5 that Suman (phonetic) is our reporter.

GROUP 3 LEADER: Yes.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: So, Suman, we will ask you to again, try to --

GROUP 3 LEADER: What is this?

MS. O'DONOGHUE: -- to mention new things so as not to repeat what we have been saying already, but to add some of the new points that we discussed in our room.

GROUP 3 LEADER: Yes, absolutely.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Yes.

GROUP 3 LEADER: And here I go, I'll shoot. I'm not going to talk about the

issues because most of the issues seem to be some similar on board. But just that issue about girls getting raped by male teachers was brought in, and the very significant to understand. And that is why the necessity to -- of protecting girls from this kind of an abuse and possibly, looking for legal system was something we all discussed. There were a few things around looking at policy, looking at interventions, et cetera, but holistically, I would say that the consensus was that one, you need to get higher leadership involved. So, it is just not policy, but you need to get a commitment from the higher leadership, and that was what was shared by Nima (phonetic) from our group. And then, once you have a policy starting up, Chimore (phonetic) said which is important, that implementation is very, very important just to have a policy in black and white and I can say the same for Sierra Leone, it is not enough. But you need to have a very good implementation plan. The third thing is that you need to have built (phonetic) agency because it is not enough only to have inputs at interventions, but you also need to empower a girl child. Considering that there is a data which is available for many countries I can speak for Sierra Leone, where there is very high maternal mortality, child early -- I mean, pregnancy and then mortality rates. So, it not only relates to that but all the other things.

One thing which I missed out speaking while I was talking is looking at interventions in the same geography. While we are talking about the girl child, it is important whether it is intersexual health, hygiene, nutrition, learning, everything needs to be brought together. Not thinking that this is an intervention only for teenage pregnant girls, but all girls together. So, it is also -- acts as an intervention to prevention, prevention to pregnancy and not only lokgin at what to do once they are there. So, that was mostly we had discussion in our group. Over and out from my side.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Suman. And thank you, everyone, I think you know, we always find in these conversations that we don't have enough time and so, we are quickly approaching the hour. I want to just quickly share my screen and show everyone here that on our Padlet we have the document which is the Google Drive document that we

were using in all of our breakout rooms, and you will be able to go in and open this up and see you know, what were those notes from the discussions in each of the groups. So, I encourage everyone to go in there and take a look to see you know, what ideas, what were people talking about, you know, as always, the report back gives us sort of the high-level summary, but we can get some of those details from that document.

And then, great, I am so happy to see that people have been putting in questions that they still have. We also have a spot here for ideas for action that people are taking with them. I know for example, that Jillian (phonetic) has been looking for someone who is working on this issue in Ghana, so if you have a specific request for example, maybe you wanted to add that there and this could become a way that you could link up with other people. So, it would be great if people could continue to use this Padlet. We will be sending out the link to everyone as well, so that we can continue to have this as a space. If you have other resources, oh, it's great to see that people have been sharing more resources here. If you have other resources that you want to add, that would be wonderful. As we say, you know, our hope here was really just to begin a conversation and to get people together who are interested and who are working on this topic to -- to sorry, I got confused by technology for a second. To come together and work on this.

It looks like something else is being -- oh, Suman, I think -- is that Suman's? Oh, no, Ceyhan (phonetic) and someone else's screen. Okay. Thank you. We had technology on our side until the very end. And then, the last thing you know, just to say before we sign off here is that as I said, this is a new series, these Echidna Global Scholar Dialogues, and part of the idea is really to build a community, or to continue to strengthen our community of global actors who are working on these issues so we have a space where we can come together and have this type of conversation.

We are learning and we want to learn from all of you, and with all of you. So we were also going to ask if you could, help us with a short evaluation. We will put the link, I see Ajiri (phonetic) has already put the link into the chat, so it would be wonderful. If you

could, it would take -- it will probably take about two minutes to fill out that evaluation. And we will also be emailing it to you. We understand that maybe you are busy now but if you have time later, that would be wonderful.

I just want to close by saying that you know, we really hope that this space has allowed you to engage with some of the evidence, experiences, and ideas about how to ensure that all girls, and especially those who may become pregnant or have had a child during the pandemic, can return, remain, and learn in school in this COVID age, but also, beyond. And how do we push together this cultural change and social change that we all spoke about today.

So, thank you so much for joining us. We hope you have a good rest of your day or if this was the end of your day, we hope you have a relaxing evening and night, too. Thank you, all. Goodbye, everyone.

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