

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

CENTERING MARGINALIZED GIRLS AND WOMEN FOR MORE INCLUSIVE POLICY
RESEARCH AND POLICY SYMPOSIUM ON GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

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WELCOME:

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OPENING REMARKS:

KHONGORZUL BATBAYAR

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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O'DONOGHUE: All right. Hello, everyone. Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening and goodnight. Thank you so much for joining us. My name is Jennifer O'Donoghue and I am a senior fellow and deputy director at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings. And it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the kickoff event of the Annual Research and Policy Symposium on Gender Equality in and Through Education. This year's theme, centering marginalized girls and young women for inclusive policy, recognizes that although recent decades have seen progress in getting more girls in school, we continue to struggle to provide comprehensive and flexible policy responses that would meet the needs and the expectations of girls and young women facing multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Policies are often designed based on typical girls are chosen voices that may not represent or attend the experiences of the most marginalized, often leaving these girls and young women to navigate fragmented systems that provide incomplete supports and only partially address the barriers they face to full participation and the equal exercise of their education, social, economic, health and other rights. In today's plenary conversation, the 2024 Academy Global Scholars will share lessons they have learned in their research over the past six months exploring how we can shift away from one size fits all or fragmented approaches and develop more holistic and inclusive policy and policy research for and with marginalized girls and young women.

This year's cohort of global scholars once again brings a depth of knowledge, a richness of experience, and a diversity of perspectives to their study of inclusive education for girls with disabilities in post-conflict Tigray Women's leadership within the education system in Tanzania. Sexual and reproductive health education for adolescent girls in Nepal and second chance education to overcome structural inequalities in Mexico. Throughout today's discussion, we invite you to share your questions and comments on access using the hashtag #EchidnaSymposium or to email them to events at Brookings today. But first, to help us frame our conversation with the scholars, it is my great pleasure to introduce Khongorzul Batbayar. Khongorzul, as an educator and program coordinator hailing from Ulan Bator, Mongolia.

She currently works as a program coordinator at the Mongol Ecology Center, where her work involves developing impactful environmental education programs for rural youth as a tool for promoting gender equality within the conservation sector. As a Future Rising Fellow, she is working on a short film focused on a female national park ranger in Mongolia to increase awareness of the environmental conservation work of rangers and encourage young women to pursue careers in this traditionally male dominated field. Khongorzul's passion for education, environmental advocacy and gender equality

converge in her mission to create a network of local climate advocates across Mongolia. Khongorzul, all over to you.

BATBAYAR: Thank you, Jennifer. Good day to everyone. My name is Khongorzul Batbayar and I'm from Ulaanbaatar to the capital city of Mongolia. I'm located just between Russia and China. I live and work here. My work with national park rangers and rural youth take me all across the country to provincial capitals, rural towns and the remote wilderness. I've had the chance to experience life in the capital city and life in the rural areas, which are like two completely different worlds. Which is why today I wanted to focus on two brief experiences of women in Mongolia to offer a glimpse into how we can better include their voices. So the first one is the story of a herder family, a mother and a daughter who represent 30% of Mongolia's population, whose livelihood still depends solely on livestock. And they're representative of the traditional nomadic way of life. This also means that they live far from towns and settlements. And as their daughter, their young daughter, has reached the age of six she's ready to enter elementary school.

For this, the mother and daughter decide to move to the province center to live at the school dormitory so her daughter can start her schooling. While she could send her daughter off to live in the dorms alone they believe she's just too young to live that far from her family. Her husband remains in the countryside hunting their livestock, but the distance and time spent away puts a strain on their family. The mother is now solely responsible for her child's education and also seeks employment in this new town. While the father takes the sole responsibility of herding the livestock, an intensive lifestyle that's already at risk due to climate change and increased extreme weather events. This is just one common example of rural families in Mongolia and how girls' education often involves sacrifices that can uproot children and their families.

It also offers a glimpse into how early childhood education and household labor are taken on by women, which is often the case in Asian countries. The other story is an experience of my own. As a climate and gender advocate, I've had the chance to meet activists and experts from across the globe and attend global events on climate change and girls' education. At one of these events, I was excited to finally see an event organized by the Government of Mongolia, hosted by a Mongolian minister. Many times it had been difficult for me to connect the international discourse with the local context of

Mongolia, so I was excited to listen to something about Mongolia for a change. The ministers spoke about policies and provided examples that were focused on improving the situation of women and girls in rural areas.

There were many examples of policies that I was aware of, such as digitalizing public services, which was quite widespread in our city. And also economic incentives for employment in rural areas. But most of these examples the Minister was discussing in an extremely transformative and positive light, which felt in a way deceiving to me, unfortunately, because I knew the reality behind all of these examples and policies as a citizen of Mongolia and I knew that these policies were not reaching rural women, let alone being successfully implemented in a capital city. While all of this is not to shed a dark light on Mongolia's situation, but it's more of a reminder for us to look on to our own awareness of the local realities of our own countries and communities. I've come to realize that many locals and nationals, including myself, are sometimes not well aware of certain local realities, as it's sometimes difficult to leave our bubble that we may not realize that we're in.

And often there aren't many representatives from the rural communities and other communities available in the capital cities or on the international stage to voice their experiences. But there's always local women and girls who are active leaders, often informally, within their communities. And I believe it's our job to reach these communities and truly connect and build lasting relationships with them, even if it takes days of driving on dirt roads, which is usually the case for me and my colleagues. But the resources to reach these communities shouldn't be a burden because it's worth including their voices, not just words, but it's a necessity.

And I would encourage everyone here today to take a moment from their busy lives and think about just one way, one way in which we can better connect to these communities and help the voices of women and girls in our own communities and beyond to come to light through our work. Thank you.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much for your comments. I have to admit, I was here busily taking notes, and I think you just reminded us of so many important aspects to this type of work. And, you know, I think from the reality. Right. That we need to understand and really be aware of the difference between policy discourse and what can be realities on the ground and how we can bring these closer

together. But the challenge that you laid to all of us to leave our bubble, leave our bubbles, and to recognize that there, I loved your phrasing of, there are always leaders, there are always active leaders and communities. And it is our job to reach out, to connect and to build lasting relationships with them. I think that was extremely eloquently said. So I wanted to quote you there, and I think that's a perfect segway into our conversation with the Echidna scholars today. So I will thank you. Thank you again.

And we'll come back to thank you some more. But at the moment, we will now turn to our panel conversation with the 2024 Echidna Global Scholars. Joining us today is Lydia Wilbard. Lydia is a seasoned gender equality advocate with over 15 years of experience advancing girls education and women's empowerment, rising through the ranks of Camp Fed's leadership since 2005, Lydia served as founding country director for Tanzania in her current role as Camp Heads, Executive Director of Learning and Engagement, she is building strategic partnerships with communities and government ministries in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania and now Kenya to support the most marginalized girls to go to school, learn and thrive. A trained nurse, Lydia has a master's degree in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. Welcome, Lydia.

Our second scholar is Magdalena Rodríguez Romero. Magda is Co-founder and Co-director of ProSociedad at a development agency specializing in the design, evaluation and scale up of evidence-based solutions for sustainable development in Mexico and Latin America. With nearly 15 years of experience in capacity building for impact driven local organizations, Magda has been recognized as a finalist for the Latin American Leaders Award, the North and Award for Socially Responsible Young Business Women and the Civil Society Research Prize promoted by the Mexican Center for Philanthropy. Magda holds a master's in development management and a bachelor's in Industrial and Systems Engineering. Welcome, Magdalena, Bien Venida.

And our third scholar is member Mebrahtom Tesfahunegn. Mebrahtom is not only Assistant Professor of Law at Mekelle University, but also committed to the defense of women's and disability rights, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, peace and conflict resolution and expanding access to justice. As Director of the Mekelle University Legal Aid Center, he has coordinated the

implementation of multiple projects to advance the rights of people with disabilities in Ethiopia and has led successful litigation against violations of the right to work and the right to access to education for girls and women with disabilities. Welcome Mebrahtom.

And rounding out our panel today is Sudha Ghimire, as an Assistant Professor of Health Education at Riverside University, where she teaches courses in reproductive and community health education. So that brings us to her work as an educator, a perspective gleaned from serving as a registered nurse in public hospitals for over 16 years. Her research interests lie at the intersection of gender, sexual and reproductive health rights and social justice, taking transformative and participatory approaches to school-based health education. So this work focuses on building the agency and critical awareness of adolescent girls for equitable reproductive health, comprehensive sexuality, education and community health. Welcome, Sudha, and welcome to all of you as always.

It is you know, it's an honor and a privilege for me to spend my time with you all over these last six months. And whenever I have this opportunity to read one after the other, your bios, I'm reminded again of just how privileged I am to be able to be learning with and from all of you. So excited that we will be bringing this learning and conversation that we have internally to the rest of the world today. I would love to just start off our conversation with each of you briefly, introducing your research topic and telling us a little bit about how you became interested in that topic, why that topic is critical for advancing gender equality in and through education in in your context and globally. And so I think, Lydia, why don't we start with you?

WILBARD: Thank you very much, Jenn, for that kind introduction. It's equally a privilege to be sitting in this space to share the findings of our research. Yeah. So my research is building on 17 years of experience working in communities and through public education system to unlock opportunities for girls, education and women, new leadership, especially from the less disadvantaged background. So while working through this space I did an analysis of around ten of the 10% of the schools in Tanzania. Which is public school. And I actually found that only 19% and that's 6% of the schools, these are the schools of 493 are led by women. So my interest was why? Why I always feel like when it comes to leadership, why are we not seeing women taking up leadership?

So my interest really was to learn and especially after we have achieved gender parity in enrollment in primary school and lower secondary school in Tanzania, I wanted to see why we're still not jumping into leadership. So I focused on leadership pathways for women and really to understand what is holding us back in advancing leadership and how especially the policies and practices can better be supportive. So I hope that the barriers that I'm uncovering from this research really inform the policy and the practices. Because to achieve system transformation, we needed to ensure gender transformation. Leadership is at the center and the education system is an entry point for us. Thank you, Jenn.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. Lydia. Magda, can you share with us about your research?

ROMERO: Thank you, Jen. Also to my co panelist, it is a privilege to share this space with you all. My research examines how policymakers' mindsets shape women's economic autonomy, policies in Mexico and how to innovate these policies to create more opportunities for marginalized women. When I say marginalized women, I mean women trapped in the vicious cycles of poverty, gender-based violence and unpaid care and domestic work. My interest in this issue began over 15 years ago when I was studying industrial engineering. An epiphany moment for me was working with food banks in Mexico, where I saw firsthand how these intersectional inequalities limit women opportunities to translate education into better economic outcomes.

This experience changed my complete life. I realized I had to do something. So I co-founded ProSociedad that I'm building on my engineering background. I also noticed the inadequacies of economic autonomy policy and how we often fail to reflect the realities women face over time. I understood that systems transformation is not only about technical solutions. It requires addressing people's mindsets, especially policymakers' mindsets. This is a critical issue for advancing gender equality, because we need to focus to go from mandates to effective action. This requires supporting policymakers to truly understand how to build policies that respond to the realities of marginalized women.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much, Magda, for that quick introduction. We look forward to hearing more. Sudha over to you to introduce your work.

GHIMIRE: Yeah, I think it's in and I will say to everyone present here, currently working as an assistant professor at the university, as a teacher educator, and worked as midwife for more than 16 years in different government hospital. I have experience of working in both its education and health service sector. So I have the firsthand experience of woman's suffering due to various forms of discrimination, including as a pregnancy that directly affect their sexual and reproductive health. So these are not only my experience. If you see the global data proximity to the millions of adolescent girls from different developing regions, I become pregnant. Many of them are facing different forms of childbirth related mortality and morbidity.

So why do these studies persist? What are actually missing? So, you know, these broad question, what motivate me to conduct this study? To do so I applied or I adopted participatory action research with adolescent girls from two public school from Nepal, from two different districts. So through my study, I was able to explore the other areas, the barriers related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. And the same time, I also work with them to strengthen their agency in relation to sexual health. The study began the month of June and still continue. I'll be happy to share more about my research for one. Thank you.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Sudha. I will definitely have a chance to hear more. And especially as you know, I've been intrigued since the beginning in the ways in which you have been bringing the power of methodology and participatory methodologies into policy, research and conversation. So thank you. And Mebrahtom same questions to start out with you. If you could just introduce your research to us. Thank you.

TESFAHUNEGB: Hello, everyone. Hello. And thank you again for the nice introduction. Well, my research is on inclusive education for girls with disability and poverty and postwar situation of children. The. My interest in inclusive education traces back to my childhood experience as a child. I was brought up by a single mother in a water region to try observing human rights violations, including

women's rights. This made me doing law school to fight injustice. After I joined law school as a law instructor, I find my life purpose to be speaking for the voiceless, fighting for the defenseless, standing for justice and lift up. The most marginalized section of the society to the possible pinnacle of their success. While working as law instructor and director of Legal Aid Center and University, I observed violation of the right to inclusive education regardless of disability, and decided to undertake a research, understand the problem deeply and to come up with a policy recommendation in my capacity as an Echidna global scholar. And there we found because that in this symposium. Thank you for having me. Thank you.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much Mebrahtom and everyone. Again, I know that's the quick introduction to your research and I really just want to wanted to give people a sense of the different topics and the different context within which you're working for this conversation today. And you know, all of you have talked about in our researching. Issues of exclusion and exclusion of some sort of girls and young women from access to the full benefits or promises of education and the other rights that come through education. And I think this is so important to our focus not just on gender equality in education, but gender equality through education. So I'm wondering if you could share with us a bit more what this exclusion looks like in the research that you conducted. What are the girls and young women in your research excluded from and what are the types of barriers that they're facing to fuller inclusion in their rights? And Lydia, why don't we start with you?

WILBARD: Well, then, unfortunately, in the context of my research, women, regardless of their background, are excluded from decision making. They are underrepresented in leadership positions in education system such as head of school or school leadership. The barrier is entrenched in the social narratives and these narratives manifested into perceptions and practices, and they are absorbed or internalized by women to them self, but also in in addition to the people that is surrounding them. For example, the narrative that women are primary caretaker and should prioritize their families.

So the practice would be in the appointment of leaders in the position women might be vastly against because the promoters think that women will not have enough time to dedicate to leadership. And

also women with a reproductive age are perceived to having lots of excuses to be able to be out. And even taking maternity leave is considered like a gap within the school system. And so apart from the narratives, these are all existing within other structural barriers like lack of childcare support and financial resources to be able to advance into a leadership and take a leadership opportunities. In addition, actually, women in rural areas face further barriers as example, access to institutions, learning and also psychosocial support because the narratives are more entrenched in rural areas and the social norms. So the absence of women leaders in the admissions system denies marginalized children, especially girls, an opportunity to unlearn the existing gender norms. And, you know, it perpetuates the cycle of underrepresentation.

ROMERO: Well, as you say, Lydia, education alone is not enough to address the historical and structural inequalities that women face. We need to address social and economic systems to get to see a deeper transformation. But I also want to acknowledge progress. Globally, two thirds of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, and women have already surpassed men in post-graduate education. But, you know, there is a still 40% gender gap in economic participation globally. The same thing is happening in Mexico. Although we have achieved gender parity in educational attainment. Women's participation in Mexico has only increased 5% in the last two decades. This progress has only benefited a small portion of women. Today, 27 million women in Mexico face multiple barriers poverty, violence and unpaid domestic and care work. And these multiple layers of exclusion exacerbate marginalization and make it impossible for them to translate education into greater economic autonomy. And what I mean about economic autonomy is the opportunity for women to generate their own labor income, have same labor conditions as men, and make their own financial decisions. Just one piece of evidence. In Mexico, five out of ten women report that unpaid care work and domestic work is their main reason for not looking for a formal job. Women in these intersections cannot even take advantage of the opportunities offered by public programs in Mexico, such as training, financial support to start and sustain business activities or job placement services to enter the labor market. Therefore, if we really want to start to achieve shared prosperity in Mexico, we must prioritize and focus in making policies work for the economic autonomy of marginalized women.

TESFAHUNE GN: Thank you, Magda. It was good, Magda, you're one step ahead talking about girls who get an opportunity to education. And my research is dealing with girls with disabilities excluded from access, learning and participation in education. Most of girls with disabilities in rural area are excluded from education, and this takes multiple forms. Most of the girls are completely excluded from education and they are not in school at all. They are either behind or not to be seen by the community engaged in household works or tied up because the parents fear they will get lost if they are with intellectual disability. And daughters with multiple disability and beyond certain age limits are completely excluded from boarding school. Boarding school is actually supposed to support and prepare girls with disabilities for inclusive education. Others are partly excluded. So they might be in school, but I kept out of classrooms, shavers, toilets.

Exam rooms and other school spaces. And finally, girls with disability who have the chance to be in a school are also excluded from participation and learning opportunities. So my research has found out that all blind girls do not have access to natural science courses except by. That also excluded from taking notes when teachers refused to read. And girls with hearing impairment do not have equal access to participate and learn from class. Teaching and learning activities for lack of sign language Interpreter. Intersectional body of gender poverty will also create formidable challenges that I can talk more in the moment. Thank you.

GHIMIRE: Very much. Thank you. The Mediterranean region has shown that the woman and the girls globally are most affected by the injuries of somebody, as you mentioned, that how they suffer, especially in the disabled girls. If you talk about the adolescent girls, particularly in the case of sexual and reproductive health. It's the same. The greatest challenges are due to both structural and institutional barriers. For example, in case of the structural barriers, there are the social structure, the social norms, you know, that see the entitlements and the restrictions that the girls, the gender stereotype rules, discriminatory practices like a value of shown or a sexually deep pollution. These create significant barriers to sexual and reproductive health that ultimately leads to exclusion from education opportunities, limiting access to quality education and personal development. So let's think there are two different scenario.

First, the girls who are out of school because of child marriage or other discriminatory practices would do not have access to education, including securing the rights. And another is the girls who are even at the school. Are not getting age appropriate or comprehensive sexuality education because of this, you know, the socio-cultural taboos. One side of pregnancy and curricular limitations are all the sex insecurity imaginable. Full of her curiosity about a sort of assurance it should open up to health. Can't talk about her problem at home. Or at school because in the school it is no safe place to discuss and is no trusted person to whom she can share her problems. You see being secluded from our entire system, including education. So now I leave the solution to all of you. Yes.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Sudha. And thank you for leaving us with that question. I think, you know, this is a question that comes from what all of you are saying. Right. Is really like women and girls and particularly women and girls who are facing different types of marginalization and especially sort of intersectional barriers are really being excluded from some of the promises that have been made around education. And so, you know, when we were talking about what should be the theme for the symposium this year, you all raised a critique of what you were seeing as both sort of these universal approaches, sort of the one size fits all on the one side, but then also this fragmentation and the, you know, sort of over targeting and not viewing people and in sort of comprehensive and holistic ways.

And so I'm curious if you can share with the viewers today, you know, what you saw in terms of existing policy approaches or existing practice approaches to try to address some of these exclusions that you have identified in your research. So what did you see in terms of practice and policy and how are these approaches, you know, not in meeting the needs and expectations of marginalized girls at the moment and Mebrahtom, I want to acknowledge that you said you wanted to come back and talk about the intersectional barriers. So I will pass it over to you.

TESFAHUNEGB: Thank you, Jenn. Intersectional barrier from poverty and also creates formidable challenge on inclusive education. And economically marginalized. Gone with Disability, interrupted her education after she died while selling most of all to cover her educational and livelihood expenses. This is an example of the many girls who are excluded from school owing to compounding effects of insecurity and poverty. My research also found out that this year and one great compounding effect

on inclusive education of girls with disability were subjected to sexual violence during the war which hindered them from education so that the war would close its destruction of schools has also worsened inaccessibility of school facilities and the destruction and looting of assistive technology.

Owing to the war, also hindered inclusive education. The thing is. Be that as it may, the policies and the strategies are not responding adequately. Addressing the exclusion of girls with disability owing to barriers could have been led by effective policies and strategies to dismantle the barriers. However, learners with disabilities are still excluded and the barriers are hindering inclusive education. The research participants in my research reported that the reasons for this is lack of awareness among the implementers. Lack of commitment, including commitment to outlook, insufficient resources. Lack of accountability. Particularly accountability owing to lack of binding legal and enforcement mechanisms. It could also be, as it can also be inferred from my policy and strategy analysis. There is also limited cooperation between the local and global actors. Global efforts are not localized in such a way that local efforts are fully supported in terms of financial, technological and expertise support. Thank you.

WILBARD: Speaking from your Mebrahtom around the policies. I wanted to start by acknowledging the fact that in my research that is, participants acknowledged the presence of policies and guidelines for promotion that are very important and useful to guide the policy makers like head of a school or district education officers, as they do promotion of leaders at the school level. However, they identified gaps within this. One of the gap is the need and criteria that require teachers to have much of a degree before they are appointed to be head of a school. This is how you do think. Why is this a problem? I think it is not a problem until when it is actually not realizing the fact that only 70% of the teachers that have degrees are female. So women are still lagging behind in terms of this criteria, and the policies are not addressing this. The other gap is the fact that women in rural areas face additional barriers. Like if they wanted to advance their career, they do not necessarily have access in this context, they either on technology or on the institutions that they need.

Additionally, there is also financial barriers on women to be able to advance into leadership and taking opportunity to meet these criterias. There is also an issue of awareness especially in school

management team, acknowledge the fact that they are not necessarily aware of the criterias that they need to build so that they can become leaders. But most importantly is the fact that the policies do not have gender targets. So participants highlighted that this is a problem because if there is no target through which we are working on stipulated in the policy, then anything we achieve in gender equality would be considered as something good. So for example, there highlighted the fact that we have eight out of 23 female teachers as head of the school, and that it would be a lot if we are starting from one. But the gender target is going to be important to be able to kind of hold us, to be able to be accountable and track where we are going.

ROMERO: Thank you, Lydia. And I want to show the case of Mexico that I think is very interesting. As a middle-income country, Mexico has a robust legal and institutional framework for gender equality, including dozens of public programs for economic autonomy, such as cash transfers and skills training. However, marginalized women cannot fully benefit from these interventions due to three main limitations in policy: universalism, fragmentation and lack of intersectional approach. So as Lydia, you said about teachers in leadership positions, the lack of gender targets is also present in Mexico. Universalism in policies assume that if programs are designed for everyone, automatically everyone will benefit. But this approach ignores the combined challenges that marginalized women face, like lack of childcare, support, poverty and gender-based violence.

Without targeted interventions for women at these intersections, we will continue to systematically exclude them to accessing and effectively use these programs. Related to fragmentation, economic autonomy programs in Mexico are operated in silos by different government agency. This means that, for example, if a woman can access entrepreneurship skills and in one place and she needs financial support, she will have to go in another place with another government agency. So these fragmentations create bureaucratic and logistical barriers and costs for marginalized women who struggle to navigate these dispersed social, educational and economic programs. Finally, economic autonomy programs often lack this view of intersectional approach, meaning that they don't consider that these are years of pure simultaneously. And this affect their enrollment promotes dropout and limits their outcomes in terms of economic autonomy. To address these limitations, policies must actively include the live experience of marginalized women in the design and implementation of economic autonomy policies in Mexico.

GHIMIRE: Yeah. Thank you, Magda. If you'll allow me, I'm borrowing the word of recommendation from you because that will fit in in Nepal as well. For example, it's a very productive health, Right. Things are looking after by, you know, to me is the ministry, Ministry of health and Ministry of Education. The both of them are going in different direction and not getting each other in their actions and activities. Like the interest in our friendly health services is a proudly program of Ministry of Health for adolescents. But this important program is nowhere mentioned in the curriculum and textbook. So how are they doing the things who are in the school good information about these services if they are not included in the curriculum. And interestingly, you know, the teacher training program and curriculum development are done in more higher level. Without considering the voices of girls from the ground floor.

The ground, the no space is given to the girls. The decision making or the policy making processes cannot involve or me the very limited involved. So and then we wonder why the program are failing, isn't it? These program, we will continue to fail until we bring aside its issues on the table and include the voices of editors in this special in the way they wanted. And if you if you want to make sure that our program and policy structures, then we need to adopt a more participatory, more holistic and inclusive and comprehensively. Yeah.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you for that. We've had a question in the chat around solutions and sort of how we can ensure solutions to some of these, you know, these really important exclusions and structural barriers and challenges that we're seeing in policy. You know, how can these solutions really be grounded in local realities? And this is something that we all have been talking about together over the past six months around sort of how do you find and where do you find pockets of promise, Right. So practices, policies, relationships that are within the systems already that are currently supporting the inclusion of marginalized girls and women and working to identify those and really thinking how to leverage those so that they can become more widespread. So I'm curious if you could share a bit around sort of what you've seen in terms of these pockets of promise that we could build off of to really advance gender equality in contextualized ways. And Magda, we'd love to start with you on this.

ROMERO: Thank you, Jen. Yes, I'm very excited about the future because there are promising practices and resources in Mexico that I think will help to center marginalized women to improve their economic autonomy outcomes. Let me give you three examples. Civil society organizations all across Mexico are implementing holistic and transformative economic autonomy interventions, combining skills training with complementary supports like peer mentoring and social protection, access to financial services and pathways to entrepreneurialism or employment. Some of these programs have a collective impact approach. For example, in Commit that a second chance education program implemented by ProSociedad that in collaboration with international organizations, government, other civil society organizations and private sector integrates these multiple dimensions of support tailored to women's needs.

The challenge now is how to take these lessons into policy level. On the other hand, Mexico has a great opportunity to build on existing resources and community infrastructure. You know, we have more than 1300 community development centers all across the country, and they provide social welfare support to families in marginalized communities. These centers can be operated to provide holistic services for women's economic autonomy. For example, the Center for Women's Justice shows a promising model. They deliver holistic and tailored services to victims of violence. Proving that inter agency collaboration is possible. And also my research showed that policymakers mindsets can change. Increasing interactions between policymakers and marginalized women can lead to more inclusive policies. But to institutionalize these practices, we need to build on existing civic participation policies, making sure we elevate the voices of marginalized women to engage directly with these policymakers.

WILBARD: Magda, just to follow up on the on your word of collaboration in my research, what I also found out is that participants highlighted a strong dialog structure and collaboration between the Minister of Immigration, the Minister of President's office, the region administrator and government in Tanzania, together with the development partners in due course. And this is an opportunity through which this collaboration can bring resources together and the programs that advance women in leadership. So the also the policies that they are already highlighting the intention to advance women

leadership in education, which is a stipulated you need questions like the development plan, but also the positive social narrative that I mentioned through the research around the role modeling. So why did the social narrative that they are putting down women? But there is those that are positive that going to be cultivated and amplified to capture the experience of women and to develop programs that can benefit them.

GHIMIRE: Okay? Yeah. thank you, Lydia. So in case of Nepal, you know, the sexual and reproductive rights are fundamental rights of women and girls. So there are the different national and international insight you have been taking place for is at a time when this is very positive thing. I, you know. And in case of school education in relation to that, a child, you know, some things are kicked into the curriculum and teacher training as well. But the main problem in kids of Nepal is that, you know, these content are not will deliver in the classroom. Because of the social and cultural taboos around such an individual can help. Can a teacher do not feel comfortable talking about sexual and sexuality within the classroom? And at the same time, students do not feel comfortable receiving the information however they want.

They, you know, so for the more than the content that are more theoretical and, you know, the lack of real-life connection with everything. So not we are failing to have the normalized conversation of sexual and sexuality, including reproductive health, within the classroom. So another thing is, you know, at the same time, you know, our educational system or pedagogy, maybe the design or delivery in such a way that it wasn't solely taken as the listener. You know, they are given very little space within the classroom to share their experiences, to share their voices. So from based on my study that to overcome this, we can work in three different area. One is increase the awareness among adolescents for sexual and reproductive health right through their own initiation. And the second is action. Participatory action around it. And third is doing leading them to educate. You encourage encouraging them to work as advocate or taking the advocacy role around the sexual and reproductive health back? I think the three will helps to resolve the issues around sexually productive health, especially if we focus on addressing. Thank you.

TESFAHUNE GN: Well, thank you, Sudha. There are also some promising efforts that we can build off in such a similar way to that Sudha has mentioned for our intervention. There are civil society and community level organizations such as The Real Talk, which are working on our own escalating activities on what we can capitalize. They need to plans, for example, to started efforts in awareness raising for the community, including by using local radio programs in all of us so we can make the forward ask more what it all means administrative unit. If we don't, for example, Alliance of Civil Societies of Tigray, which has a network with religious and community-based organizations, that that could also help us to modify the awareness raising activities for commitment and capacity building interventions.

There are also local civil society organizations working to improve the infrastructure by providing assistive technology wheelchair, materials in Braille. So, there is a potential, particularly if they are financially, technically and technologically supported. International, bilateral and multilateral. The U.S. State Department and other global actors active in provision of technologies, are also the promising potential for the collaboration with local actors for accountability intervention. The government has the good intention to make inclusive education, and this will also lead to enact enforcement binding enforcement mechanisms. So the civil society organizations, legal aid centers can also launch public interest litigation or advocate for legislation. So these are the potentials on which we expect to capitalize on them. Thank you.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you all. I think you know that identification that you've done of what exists in in communities and in context that could be built upon is so important as we think about how to create sort of how to catalyze right change within systems and really taking advantage of the important work that's already being done for sort of our last round before we start to wrap up here, would really, you know, like to talk a bit and hear a bit from, from you around the, the, the methodology that we use to bring evidence into practice.

So you've all spoken to the importance of more inclusive policy and practice and we need to also think about what that means in terms of the evidence that we use to design policy and practice. And, you know, so I want to give you sort of to highlight your work here because you've been doing, as you've

mentioned, participatory action research and really would love for you to share with us a bit more about how you have tried to center the experiences, voices and agency of adolescent girls in your own research and how you feel like that connects into changes in policy and practice.

GHIMIRE: Yeah, I think is in. So I adopted a participatory action research approach which is more context specific and trust me too. So the study followed the multi cycle and multi-phase iterative process starting from planning action, observation and reflection. So here I'm explaining it more in linear way, but this study will continue in the more cyclical way of the path. So first I build trust with editors and give. You know, by continual feeling isn't mean. So I was there, the active listener, better listeners. And at the same time, I also formed it was sending a signal with two logos from both school who acted as a first line communicator. Then aggressively started working with them. I involve them in different, you know, workshop.

During the workshop we discussed about the policy provision regarding areas, you know, the national policies or the program. And I also share my own experience around it. And all of the time this started opening up themselves. The status hearing, their condition, the talking. Been there on two stories. And at the same time, they also started to look critically questioning the social norm in discrimination clearly, they're facing. And they started, you know, bringing their voices and initiative to take the action.

And in the series of action, they also started expressing their awareness and knowledge in various form. Such as writing a poem, creating art, composing songs related to the such an individual. And see now they are advocating these actions to be incorporated in extracurricular activities by pressurizing the school administration. They are also planning to do the community rallies and preparing to publish a booklet about their sexual and reproductive health. Right. That, you know, they develop. They wanted to make the booklet out of the poem or the drama or the song. And they make they came off with. So just imagine the girls who were once very uncomfortable, even for those who were sexuality or reproductive health before I start. You know the reaction research we do and just in a 3 to 4 month. They are, you know, in, you know, taking the central role taking is into actions and, you know, considering themselves as a law and a champion. So this is how centering girls and providing them is develop the reasons.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much. So, you know, I remember yesterday we were reviewing some of the questions that came in as folks registered for the event. And one question was around how do we sort of buffer, you know, this type of inclusive policy and practice from changes in government and political changes and things like that. And, you know, one of the pieces that that we thought of in that conversation was your work with the girls. Right. And really thinking about it is about the girls. When the girls themselves are the champions of their rights, then, you know, that can help to buffer a bit what is happening up above. And so just thank you for reminding us of the importance of that as we start to close out. So we're reaching the end of our hour and I would love to just turn over to all of the scholars to share with us sort of one main takeaway, one thing that should come next. What needs to be done to move us forward in advancing gender equality in the different topics that you're working on? And I'm going to start with whoever raises their hand.

ROMERO: I can. I can get us started. And I think I would. I would like to make just one recommendation. We need to strengthen local ecosystems for women's economic autonomy. And this involves two things. For policymakers, you need to get out of the bubble asking girls to go and talk to women, but not just the women who participate and graduate for your programs.

Talk to those that dropped out that didn't get the chance to really participate in their programs. And also, we need to take services as near as the communities, as near to the women as possible to increase their opportunities for economic autonomy. We need to go out and deliver the nearest to them as possible.

TESFAHUNEGB: Well, I can also have one recommendation that is effectively enforcing the policies and the strategies by creating awareness, by strengthening commitment and capacity of the different stakeholders and by ensuring accountability.

GHIMIRE: Yeah. I think I can go to the next place. If you really want to see every girl's woman enjoy their sexual and reproductive health right, the first and foremost thing is centering their voices and centering the policy in print that directly give gives space to their voices.

WILBARD: Above all, everything that has been said is correct. For me, that for me is really we needed to develop gender responsive policy in education sector, especially in Tanzania, that sent that women's experience. And collaboratively, I think everyone has a responsibility here. So the policy makers, the development partners and CSOs and centering the communities here, especially in awareness and dismantling gender and social norms.

O'DONOGHUE: Thank you all so much. You know, I our time today was short, and I think we've begun to scratch the surface of the research. And as the richness of both the findings and the recommendations that each of you have been developing, not just over the past six months, that you've been part of the Echidna program, but really in the in the decades that you've been working in these different areas. So we hope for all of you who've joined us today that this has provided a taste of the important research that they can as scholars have been doing. I want to remind everyone that this plenary conversation is just the beginning of the symposium. So please join us for workshops.

Each of the scholars will be hosting a deep dive interactive virtual Workshops workshop in their specific research topic they have they will be joined by colleagues who are working at global level, at national level, subnational level, who will really help to explore the findings, think about the recommendations, think about opportunities to really create impact from this research, both in local contexts and globally. Again. Our first workshop starts in just an hour and a half. So grab some coffee, some tea, some water and please come back and join us again in an hour and a half. And then we have three workshops tomorrow that will run from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. And you can find more information and register for all of these events on this symposium event page.

I also just want to close by saying that we are currently accepting applications for 2025 academic global scholars. The deadline is December 15th, so please visit our Web page, the Brookings Web page, for more information on that. And finally, I want to thank again Khongorzul for providing the framing for today's conversation to go rising in the Future Rising Fellows program for ongoing collaboration over the past four years. And of course, to our stars of the show, the 2024 Connect

Global Scholars. Thank you all for joining us today, and we hope to see you again, hopefully in a few moments in our virtual workshops. Take care, everyone.