



CSW Reflections

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Presentation Topic:

**Women's Empowerment
through Education -**

Advancing in STEM

(Science, Technology, Engineering & Math)



Introduction

When I was packing for my spring break, my housemates absentmindedly reminded me to pack sunscreen, shades, and sandals. I did not bother correcting them, since it was no surprise that they forgot that I would not be heading to the beach this year, like so many of my classmates to celebrate time off from school. I was amused to their faces twist in confusion as they saw my suitcase full of sweaters and trousers in lieu of the more tropical gear they had suggested. Thus the question “Wait, where are you going again?” floated around my dorm, and my brief explanation of WomenNC, CSW, and the Fellowship began once more. I had become accustomed to outlining what my trip to the United Nations in New York would entail, but as the day approached, I admit to having no idea of what the week held for me. I was confident about my research, the work of the other Fellows, and the overall CSW experience, and I did not doubt that the trip would be immensely exciting and life changing. Still, I was uncertain as to how the week would play out. Now, looking back on my experiences at CSW, I see that there was nothing to worry about. That week was everything all at once, and, quite frankly, indescribable. From the conference itself, to the Fellows’ presentations; from the lessons I learned, to the treasurable moments scattered throughout the week, I have a plethora of material to reflect back on.

Blueprint for CSW

First, it’s pertinent that I layout the schedule for my week at CSW, since the busy itinerary was central to my experience. Our group was in NYC for eight days, Saturday to Saturday, and early mornings became a staple for the trip (this was my greatest struggle,



since I am not a morning person). We hit the ground running as soon as we left the airport—sign-in, badge pickup, and rehearsals filled our first Saturday late into the evening, thus giving us a taste of what was in store for the rest of the trip. The following day was NGO Consultation Day, which formally welcomed international organizations to the 58th CSW and hosted several high--profile panels, speakers, and performances. The rest of the week consisted of events each day (20 in total) and our presentations were early on Tuesday morning. Other events lasted alongside CSW, such as the NGO Reception Dinner and the Girls Lead International presentation, and these events, in combination with the various panels and meetings throughout the day, ensured a busy week with a lot of interaction with people from all over the world.

Important Lessons

The greatest take-away came from what I learned at the individual panels at CSW. My realization of how replicable my best-practice model is on the local, national, and global level. The best-practice model I researched, the role-model-and-support method, has been implemented in various ways by organizations all over the world. For example, the global community platform, Womensphere, employs a large-scale version of the role-model-and-support method in its efforts to reach out to young women everywhere and develop their potential. Womensphere specifically centers on encouraging women's leadership in STEM, and by inspiring these women through collaborative organizations that educate and empower, the organization manages to increase the participation of women in science-based fields. In sum, Womensphere provides young women with collaborative support and various



role models across the STEM disciplines as a means for advancement. Other organizations outside of Womensphere utilized the role-model-and-support method as well. The Open A Door Foundation has created a “team mentoring” program that develops the education of low-income women in Afghanistan and Rwanda. This program provides these young women with the support and mentorships necessary to succeed in the higher levels of education and application processes. Likewise, the Afghan Girls Financial Assistance Fund aids the college education of Afghan women by financially supporting and mentoring them. The use of the role-model-and-support method in these organizations encouraged me to look further into this best--practice model. Since it has shown success for not only The PURPOSE Institute, but also foundations all over the globe, understanding and analyzing its most successful components would allow for the perfection of this model and further implementation.

The Little Things

While I loved learning more about my own topic through the various panels CSW had to offer, I was equally interested in the discussions I knew less about, such as gender-based violence (GBV) and female genital mutilation (FGM). Being able to choose from several unique panels was one of the greatest perks of travelling to CSW, and I got to attend both NGO discussions and round-table side events at the UN to learn about these topics. On Thursday, Amy and I attended a conference at the UN given by labor representatives from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Finland. The event focused on the economic impacts of domestic violence in these three countries, and provided intense detail as to the main problems and solutions these nations have explored to resolve the issue. The fact that there was a comparison and



contrast of these solutions was most appealing to me, since it allowed me to see many perspectives of the same issue. Additionally, I attended a discussion of FGM at the UN with Isabella on Tuesday, after our own presentation had been completed. This topic was particularly intriguing, since the topic is not as openly discussed in comparison to other issues I came across at CSW. Representatives from various states, international organizations, and NGO's all met to share their thoughts, opinions, and solutions on the issue, and the diversity in the room offered an interesting demographic. This certainly played a role in the level of conversation amongst representatives, and it also gave me the chance to see how the UN usually monitors round-table discussions. Both of these topics, among others, were great events since they allowed me to explore other interests outside of my own research. Furthermore, they gave me the chance to see the inner workings of the UN, analyze the solutions people have created all over the world, and hear the many diverse perspectives on varying topics.

Conclusion

Overall, I feel as though there is so much to say about my trip to CSW. Yet I know that writing fails to grab the essence of the experience that makes it so life changing and extraordinary. As I went through the week, I was swept away by the surreal intensity surrounding the Commission on the Status of Women. At every passing moment there were new people, conversations, lessons, and open doors. I left for New York confident yet uncertain about my time at CSW. CSW left me with a greater urge to learn more, speak up, and share my incredible experiences with the people around me.