

First Lady's Girls' Summit

ICPD25 & UNFPA50



Initiated in 2018, the First Lady's Girls' Summit in Botswana is fast gaining traction as space that breaks the barriers. The 2nd annual girls' summit with First Lady of the Republic of Botswana Mrs Neo Jane Masisi brought together over 200 girls from 15 different schools in Tutume sub-district in a 'safe space' to discuss their life experiences and get empowered with critical SRH information. This year's summit was also used to launch the celebration of the ICPD @25 and UNFPA@50 anniversaries.

192

GIRLS

SAFE SPACE

10

BOYS

12

HEARING IMPAIRED
GIRLS



Breaking barriers through open, safe spaces for young people

“Gone are the days where policy makers tell you what is right for you, you should tell us what is right for you,” encouraged the First Lady of the Republic of Botswana Mrs Neo Masisi at the second annual First Lady’s Girls’ Summit in Tutume.

UNFPA supported the First Lady of Botswana host the second annual Girls’ Summit which brought together 202 adolescent girls and boys from 15 junior and senior secondary schools in Tutume sub-district. Hosted under the theme *#BreakingBarriers*, the summit created a safe space for young girls to dialogue on SRH issues and to be provided with correct information on the issues. The dialogue focused on teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse & exploitation, and HIV prevention. The summit is part of the First Lady’s continued efforts to connect with as many girls as possible around the country, to understand the challenges they face, while inspiring and empowering a generation of life champions.

In a conservative environment like Botswana where communication between adults and young people on sexual and reproductive health issues is a taboo, the dialogue provided a unique space to break this barrier.

In recognition of the right of young people living with disabilities to participate and access information, 12 girls from **Francistown Centre for Deaf Education** participated in the summit, much to the delight of students like Janet Moji, 13, who appreciated the inclusion stating, “When you bring our peers together like this, also include us so that we can interact with other young people and not feel like we are separate.

Being one of the countries with the highest HIV prevalence, the only country in Southern Africa with an increase of new HIV infections and high teenage pregnancy for a middle income country, the First Lady’s Girls’ Summit provides the much needed platform to empower girls with correct SRH information and ensure their ability to claim their rights.



First Lady of Botswana, Mrs Neo Masisi with students from John Nswazwi Junior Secondary school.



Janet Moji engaging with the First Lady in sign language



First Lady of Botswana, Mrs Neo Masisi with students from Tutume McConnell Senior Secondary school.



Preventing teenage pregnancy- returning to school after: the unfinished business of the ICPD

“Girls are still falling pregnant and are forced to drop out of school because they are not educated about family planning early enough,” reflected Olorato Batoeng as she shared her experience as a young mother at the Girls’ Summit.

Falling pregnant in 2015 at 17 years old while at Ledumang Senior Secondary school, Olorato was one of a growing number of girls in Botswana who are forced to drop out of school because of unplanned pregnancies. After the father of her daughter left her, Olorato had to rely on family to support her and her daughter. Despite the challenges she was facing, Olorato remained determined to go back to school to achieve her dreams of becoming a librarian. Wanting to be closer to home when she returned to school two years later, Olorato was transferred to Tutume McConnell Senior Secondary school in 2017, but was forced to put her hopes of going back to school on hold as there was no one to help look after her daughter. “I stayed at home for one year doing nothing, sometimes I feel like I lost two years of my life.”

Never giving up on herself, she was finally able to return to school in 2018, “I realised life will be very difficult if I didn’t go back to school since I am a mother now.” As one of the few girls who return to secondary school after having a child, Olorato acknowledges that it is not easy, with the fear of stigma keeping too many girls out of school. Olorato credits focusing on her goals and wanting a better life for herself as what helped her prevail and return to school.

Reflecting on the challenges she faced as a young mother, Olorato pleads for more to be done to help girls prevent unintended pregnancies. “Girls should be taught about family planning as early as Junior school (13-16 years old) rather than waiting until they get to Senior Secondary school where it will be very late for them.”

Girls going to school, and completing their education is critical to the achievement of the ICPD agenda. Addressing unmet need for family planning remains the unfinished business of the ICPD in Botswana. In fulfilment of the commitments made at the International Conference on Population and Development, young people’s right to reproductive health education, information and care must be promoted and protected to reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies.



Olorato Batoeng

Inclusion: the unfinished business of the ICPD

Addressing the First Lady Mrs Neo Masisi, “Do you know sign language?” asked Janet Moji from Francistown Centre for Deaf Education. The simple question spoke to the reality of hearing impaired young girls like Janet who struggle to access SRH information because it is not available in a medium suited for their needs. The need for investments in resources such as hearing aids and capacity building of service providers to ensure that all young people have access to SRH information and services is the unfinished business of ICPD.

Further, as part of ensuring inclusion and leaving no one behind, a number of young boys were included. They too had the opportunity to dialogue and talk about the SRHR challenges that they face as boys.



Janet Moji using sign language to express the need for better support for young people with disabilities

Extracts from: Foundational Guidelines for Action For Providing Rights-Based GBV and SRHR Services for Women and Young Persons with Disabilities, Women and Young Persons with Disabilities

- Participation of women and young persons with disabilities at all stages of programme development and assessment.
- Inclusive services for people with and without disabilities.
- Respect for a person’s legal capacity, informed consent, and privacy, along with mechanisms for supported decision-making and confidentiality safeguards.
- Sufficient funding for accessible services.
- Training and supportive supervision of service providers and support staff about the rights and needs of women and young persons with different types of disabilities and how to provide respectful care. Incorporate disability issues in curricula for service providers and support staff.
- Effective referrals through streamlined inter-agency coordination.
- Accessible services (physical, information, communication, financial, sensory environment).



Photo Gallery



UNFPA Representative South Africa, Country Director Eswatini and Botswana Ms Beatrice Mutali with students at the Girls' Summit



UNFPA Botswana Assistant Representative Ms Mareledi Segotso with students at the Girls' Summit