



On June 18, 2019, Development Alternatives for a New Era (DAWN), delivered a webinar on SRHR advocacy in collaboration with [FEMNET \(African Women’s Development and Communication Network\)](#) and [RESURJ \(Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice\)](#). In this report you will find summaries of the presentations and discussions.

We would like to acknowledge and thank our participants from Argentina, Egypt, Fiji, Iraq, India, Italy, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uruguay and Zimbabwe; as well as our speakers: Sachini Perera (Sri Lanka), Françoise Kpeglo Moudouthe (Cameroon), Dandan Zhang (Taiwan), Yiping Cai (China), Florencia Partenio (Argentina); and moderator María Graciela Cuervo (Dominican Republic).

Introduction and background

In the 25 years since Cairo ICPD, which internationally recognized Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), we have gained and overcome many challenges. It hasn’t been an easy road and especially in the recent years new challenges have emerged not just for the SRHR advocacy but also for LGBTQI+ and women rights in general. This is reflected in a paper published by DAWN “[Body, sexuality and reproduction in a changing context](#)”.

DAWN opened this online conversation to share this paper to explore some of the global challenges identified in the advocacy and debates related to the SRHR agenda. Challenges identified related to the divergence and fragmentation of the SRHR paradigm, building broader alliances for SRHR within and across movements, rising of right-wing and conservative forces, challenges brought by Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Information & Communication Technologies, and last but not least how corporate power is co-opting and influencing the SRHR agenda.

DAWN, together with FEMNET and RESURJ, commented and reflected on some these challenges by promoting a virtual exchange on how these challenges manifest in our regional contexts and then to explore ideas on how they can be faced and overcome.

Challenges and debates in moving SRHR Agenda forward in the context of implementation of the SDGs and beyond

By Dandan Zhang, DTI alumna and co-author of the paper

In the process of revision of the trajectory of advocacy and debates on SRHR, although the paradigm of sexual and reproductive health and rights has been widely recognized and accepted in international advocacy spaces after Cairo 1994; the attempts by always-growing conservative forces to separate issues of reproductive and sexual rights, never stops. Dandan spoke about the fact, that reproductive rights and sexual rights are always treated in these negotiation processes as controversial issues or oversimplified as issues of LGBTQI+ rights, or as sex work without being regarded as fundamental human rights issues.

It is also important to understand that the current divergence and fragmentation of the SRHR paradigm has led unfortunately to a division of SRHR movements that challenges our capacities to build broader alliances within and across movements. As the paper states, SRHR is a very comprehensive agenda, which touches upon rights, health, sexuality and the body. The division of sexual and reproductive health (SRH), reproductive rights (RR), and sexual rights (SR) does not change the core elements of this agenda.

Regarding the rising of the right wing and conservative power, the paper states that the alliances against SRHR, women's rights and gender equality between conservative religious fundamentalism, right-wing parties and populism movements has always been one of the biggest challenges faced. They have been gaining more political weight in the past two decades. Dandan adds that conservative rights are occupying policy-making spaces at national, regional and international level. It is evident that the rising populism is embracing traditional values, religious fundamentalism and extremism to amplify their influence, and women's rights, gender equality and SRHR issues have become a token for them to build their allies and to exchange their interests.

Dandan also referred to the threats as well as opportunities brought by ICTs. The dominant development narrative on the role of information communication technologies (ICTs) is that it is an efficient tool to empower women and other marginalized groups. However, states and private owned ICTs companies pose new threats to human rights, justice and dignity in multiple arenas; for instance, governments collecting data for surveillance or companies using algorithms to target consumers for profits. It should also be noted that the context of the definition of reproductive rights has been changed by assisted reproductive technologies (ATR technologies), which have resulted in challenges to SRHR related advocacy.

Dandan finished of her presentation by illustrating the infiltration of international capitals and influence of corporate power with three cases: (1) reproductive activities are becoming a form of commercial production with the development of assisted reproductive technologies, a new way for the private sector to explore women's bodies; (2) current agendas of digitalization are framed mainly by private sector with a focus on business interest with no supervision from stakeholders at all; and (3) the rising influence of corporate power in policy-making space, especially with the promotion of public-private partnerships and the private section as a "a key partner in providing funding" in the context of the SDGs.

Corporate capture of SRHR agenda: new narratives, old myths

By Cai Yiping, DAWN Executive Committee member and co-author of the paper

Yiping's intervention went deeper and looked at the influence of the private sector as a key current challenge by starting to ask "What is corporate capture in SRHR? What is new in this corporate capture narrative?" Once again, by looking at the trajectory of advocacy and debates on SRHR, history tells us that the private sector influence in health is not new. In actual fact, it has been there for a long time, especially with States withdrawing from being the provider of public services in the health sector. The main concerns are – 'Who provide the services? What kind of services are being provided, and who has the access to these services'?

In the case of China, Yiping said, some services are supposed to be provided through the procurement by professional social organizations, for example HIV/AIDS care. However, there are more and more businesses and private companies that obtain the procurement contracts. The public-private partnerships (PPPs) have opened the door for corporate capture in a more influential way. In the name of mobilizing private financing for health, with their access to huge monetary resources, the group of pharmaceutical companies through their philanthropic arm and big IT companies are playing a major role in the health sector as has never been seen before, not only in terms of providing the services to fill the gap of 'unmet needs', but also in the setting of the agenda.

Yiping said that this is a "new" phenomenon and there is a "new" narrative, yet they repeat old myths. For example, the myth that efficiency and better quality in health can only be met by involving the private sector, because government does not have the funds nor the capacity to meet these needs. This is further reinforced by the idea that private sector can provide more options in the current context of states having limited funding, private capital can bring in new funds. The private sector signs contracts with the governmental agency and commits to deliver services, but what actually happens is that they collect very detailed health data and personal information of individuals that goes beyond their mandate to provide health services. There is no regulation or mechanism for holding the companies accountable, whether they deliver the services or to assess its quality. In actual fact, the clinics collect the patient's private data and, in this way, not only do the governments lose control of the data, but

also the opportunity to better develop health programs and enhance community service delivery. For example, in the case of youth's SRHR, the authority allows the company to sell condoms via vendor machines inside campuses, rather than providing comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum as a solution to solve the problem of the spread of HIV/AIDS and STI and unwanted pregnancy amongst young people.

The question is how do we reclaim SRHR from corporate capture? How we strengthen accountability mechanisms for this sector? Yiping, reinforced Dandan's comments and said that we need to rewrite the narrative of the SRHR agenda, to look for ways to urge governments to prioritize rights from profits making, to reclaim public goods and finally to demand accountability and regulation mechanisms for the private sector.

Instrumentalization and cooptation of SRHR by private sector: the case of LGBTQI+ agenda

By Flora Partenio, DAWN Executive Committee member

In her presentation Flora addressed the commitments and voluntary social responsibility assumed by the private sector specifically in relation to the LGBTQI+ agenda, the need to analyze the role of the private sector in the creation of indicators of inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the labor market and finally invited the participants to assess if private sector efforts towards fulfillment of sexual rights are meaningful or mere "*pinkwashing*".

Flora cited many examples that show how the private sector uses and misinterprets the demands of feminists and sexual dissidence, in order to "wash" the face of corporate power. This becomes evident in the "projects of sexual diversity inclusion" or in their commitment to "Workplace Equality". In some cases, this refers to diverse actions during pride month, actions planned for consumers and in other cases the actions are focused on measuring "the best workplaces for #LGBTQI+ equality". It is important to unpack this and disclose the double standards of these companies.

In relation to the companies that lead the ranking of labor inclusion of LGBTQI+ persons, Flora reflected: How can I interpret equality and equity if Bayer, Marriot Hotel, Amazon and Chevron are ranked top in this list? While they apply these standards, Bayer extends more land to Monsanto by removing peasants from their lands, Chevron eludes sanctions based on extractivist practices, Amazon keeps their workers in precarious jobs, and Marriot outsource female workers. How can we unveil this *pinkwashing*? Take the case of REPSOL, this oil company has joined the campaign for labor inclusion of LGBTQI+ people and people living with HIV in Spain, but the subsidiary companies of Repsol have violated environmental norms in Argentina, in extractivist projects. On the other hand, we have a number of companies, perceived as LGBTQI+ friendly, financing anti-gay politicians in the USA, e.g. AT&T and USP. We have to unpack the narratives of inclusion and LGBTQI+ equity and unveil the false discourse of corporate social responsibility that is at the root of these narratives.

Like both Dandan and Yiping, Flora reflected on the challenges of building alliances across and within movements. The celebration of 50-years of Stonewall, a historical event that had the protagonists of lesbians, drag queens, gays, trans people, migrants, pushes us to think of the various current challenges. As said by queer researchers Schliebener and Cuello (2019), there are ongoing "powerful processes of assimilation of our differences, that reduce our life to a citizenship mediated by the act of consuming, which is very distant from the utopias of sex and bodies autonomy that stand today far from of individuals indomitable determination against the tireless insistence of the capitalist normality". According to Flora, this needs to be further analyzed in the context of a global anti-gender campaign and even in front of opponents to the trans agenda within the feminist movement.

Looking forward, Flora calls on us to focus our energies to build a strong diverse alliance to interlink the agendas of justice that these movements promote to achieve economic, social, education, health, reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. "We need an alliance to challenge racism and hetero-normative patriarchy that can and should also address the rise of corporate power".

Reflections on how to create a stronger movement to end harmful practices in Africa

By Françoise Kpeglo Moudouthe, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)

In her intervention Françoise focused on the challenges in the advocacy and debates on SRHR in Africa around issues of female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and she further reflected on the creation of broader alliances especially when it comes to the movement to end these harmful practices in the region.

In spite of existing strong normative standards in Africa, such as the Maputo Protocol, the pervasive taboos, the lack of resources, the competition for resources at national level all result in a very weak national implementation of the commitments. The reality is that the African Union and regional institutions do not have any coercive mechanisms to demand accountability and to ensure that commitments happen. The global trend of closing civic spaces is also evident in Africa, which adds another negative element of a scenario where there is increasing backlash from conservative, religious and politic leaders with conservative views of the world.

Harmful practices such as ending child marriage and FGM through campaigns, social mobilization and education have become the major platform for SRHR advocates. The challenge is that groups are mainly working in silos. The 'silosation', as mentioned in DAWN's paper, also weakens cross movement alliances in the African region. We are only starting now to connect FGM and child marriage, we are still very weak, slow and ineffective, and this approach creates competition between movements for funding, political attention and resources, affirmed Françoise.

Harmful practices are the symptoms, the manifestation of the same form of oppression that is happening to our bodies, in our SRHR and our realities. We need to focus on what is the cause behind these harmful practices, we need to look ahead and build alliances that tackle harmful practices as entry points to introduce and leverage discussion around bodily autonomy, reproduction, sexuality and sex rights across feminist movements.

Bringing pleasure back into discourse

By Sachini Perera, RESURJ

Sachini's presentation focused on how pleasure has disappeared from SRHR policy spaces and discussions and provided forms to bring pleasure back into the discourse. Experience shows that in all advocacy around abortion, contraception, education; pleasure is a central theme, yet public health approach has taken pleasure out of the conversation. When looking at contraception, as an example, donor agendas and funding landscape in general, the focus is on family planning and pleasure falls out of these discussions. Or when it comes to adolescent sexuality, the focus is very much on normative or legal solutions and pleasure is again out of this conversation.

RESURJ "365 days of pleasure" campaign has been an attempt to analyze how to talk about pleasure, not just sexual, but also other various forms of pleasure. The campaign is also an acknowledgment of how a lot of the same structures like the neoliberal economic policies and patriarchal structures are also driving and setting the agenda on what is pleasure.

Sachini went on to say that the discussions on pleasure is also missing from key regional and international human rights spaces and instruments. Well-being, prosperity, safe and full sex life, bodily and mental integrity are the terms used instead of calling pleasure what it is and even when pleasure is raised in these spaces it is only when civil society brings it into the conversation, as we did in the CPD events of 2017. The question is whether SRHR activists will accept this demand of pleasure to be considered politically and to be spelt out as part of the enjoyment of people's rights.

In regards to the challenge of current commodification of the SRHR agenda, as was presented in DAWN's paper, RESURJ raised the issue that pleasure and well-being have also become commodified. Pleasure is often seen, manifested and promoted as a privilege. According to Sachini, this goes hand in hand with patriarchy and the rising conservatism. Pleasures, especially sexual pleasure, are rejected on moral ground; if at all recognized, is in relation to the needs of able, cisgender heterosexual men. Taking a feminist intersectional approach to pleasure for the future means, including this approach in the policies of the various groups which have been missing or at the margins of these conversations, such as people with disabilities.

Finally, Sachini referred to activism on internet rights, internet governance and the interconnection with the objective of bringing pleasure back into the conversation. It has taken a lot of hard work over a long period to ensure that gender, sexual rights and queerness are included in internet governance discourse. She shared the example of the Asia Pacific regional internet governance forum in 2017 held in Bangkok, with participants from India, Nepal and Sri Lanka presented their findings on how queer people experience the internet. If we are to introduce pleasure, we need tools to do it. We already have [feminist principles of the internet](#) that lay out what makes a feminist internet, what elements are critical to the work such as access, freedom of expression, anonymity, privacy, among others, and how women and queer people express themselves on the internet. Unfortunately, this is not happening in national policy spaces on ICTs and when countries focus on prevention of electronic crimes,

criminalizing expression, they try to control our bodies, focus on harm rather than consent and not on the wider issues we are promoting as we look at how we occupy the internet¹.

In her concluding remarks, Sachini called for more cross-movement building and activism to influence the internet governance spaces and debates since they are happening in most of our countries. There is also a need to create and share resources on how we can be part of internet governance, and how we interlink it with other feminist issues and debates, so that when we have debates on technology related violence it is not just about legal solutions but also looking at issues like state and corporate accountability.

Facing the challenges

The last part of the webinar was a Q&A space with the participants, most of which related to SRHR advocacy from a human rights approach, accountability and ways of resisting corporate infiltration in SRHR. Universality and indivisibility of human rights, continues to be a key pillar to base our advocacy.

How can we push and better use the UN mechanisms that monitor the implementation of human rights commitments? How to protect the human rights approach from co-optation and misinterpretation by the conservatives? Do we need push forward our own interpretation of human rights and make sure issues like pleasure are clearly protected and recognized?

In relation to accountability, we discussed that the State also has a responsibility to hold each other accountable and that our demands for accountability must address State contradictions and demand extraterritorial obligations.

UN Treaty Bodies, such as CEDAW and CESCR, are one of the best examples of accountability mechanisms for State obligations to ensure HRs, but they are currently under threat with budget cuts. At the same time the UN reform is placing the 2030 agenda in the center, which is non-binding and has no real accountability mechanism. SRHR activists need to be aware and active in the spaces and demand these priorities are placed in the center of all UN discussions.

To close of the discussions, Alejandra Scampini DAWN Senior Associate, referred to the ongoing process of creating a legally binding UN instrument to ensure the protection of human rights from the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises and it is the Human Rights Council which hosts the negotiation process. There are various civil society networks and campaigns that have been pushing for this instrument for many years, most recently a collective of feminist organizations, activists and ally organizations that have been working together to integrate a gender justice perspective into the legally binding instrument. The group is called Feminist for a Binding Treaty, and this is a space where connections to SRHR advocacy can be further developed.²

¹ Other resources on internet governance shared by Sachini: <https://genderit.org/feminist-talk/what-do-women%E2%80%99s-rights-have-do-sdgs-and-internet>; <https://groundviews.org/2018/01/15/technology-related-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-sri-lanka-key-trends/>; http://resurj.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Resurj%20submission%20on%20online%20violence%20against%20women_0.pdf

² More on the work of the Feminist for the Binding Treaty here: <http://dawnnet.org/un-binding-treaty-on-human-rights-and-transnational-corporations/>; <http://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Fem4BT-2018-Womens-rights-beyond-the-business-case.pdf>