

MARCH
17
10.30 - 12.00



The Contribution of Indigenous Women and Girls to Economic Empowerment

**Baha'i International Community Offices,
866 UN Plaza, New York**

Speakers

Cherry Smiley: IWASI: *"Challenges to Economic Empowerment of Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada"*

Christine Stark: Cherokee and Anishinaabe writer, community organizer, and visual artist: *"First Peoples of the Americas"*

Bonnie Williams: NAWO YWA : *"The challenges facing young indigenous women"*

Nuala Nagle: JELA Foundation (Jeunes de Limbe en Action) Haiti : *"Identity & Belonging: Connecting to indigenous heritage through the Arts"*

Justina Mutale: Justina Mutale Foundation: *"African Indigenous Women"*

Sarah Burr: YWCA Australia: *"Challenges to the Economic Empowerment of Indigenous Women and Girls in Australia"*

Emma Jones: NAWO YWA: *"Where is the power in economic em[power]ment for young indigenous women?"*



Supported by: WYWCA, EBBF, ADVANCE

Panel Biographies



Sarah Burr is a member of the Wiradjuri indigenous peoples of Australia. She is Vice President of the YWCA Canberra and a member of the YWCA's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group and works full-time at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Indigenous Affairs.



Cherry Smiley is a Nlaka'pamux (Thompson) and Dine' (Navajo) woman living, working, and studying on Mohawk territories in Montréal, Quebec. She is a proud First Nations woman, feminist, artist, and activist as well as the co-founder of IWASI: Indigenous Women Against the Sex Industry.



Christine Stark is a speaker, organizer, trainer, and an award-winning writer and visual artist of Anishinaabe/Cherokee ancestry. Her publications include the novels, *Nickels: A Tale of Dissociation*, a Lambda Literary Finalist and *Carnival Lights*. She is also a co-editor of *Not for Sale*, an international anthology about prostitution, trafficking, and pornography and a co-author of "Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota."



Bonnie Williams is a sixth-form student from Gloucestershire in the UK. She is currently studying for A-Levels in English Literature, Sociology, Philosophy and Art. She is an active member of Femsoc, a student-run club which campaigns for equality and women's rights.



Nuala Nagle is a qualified Dance Movement Psychotherapist (DMP) and has a background in Occupational Therapy. She is a programme coordinator in Dance and Arts for Health and Well-Being with JELA Foundation (Jeunes de Limbe en Action) Haiti



Justina Mutale was made African Woman of the Year in 2012 and is the Founder and President of the Justina Mutale Foundation and Positive Runway. She is also a Distinguished Member of the Royal Biographical Institute and the Global Institute of Human Excellency.



Emma Jones is a PhD Candidate at the University of East London where she is a recipient of an Excellence Scholarship. She holds a Master's in Education, Gender and International Development, and a Master's in Social Research Methods. Her PhD research explores how discourses of empowerment shape gendered subjectivities in the context of global development.

Welcome From The Chair of NAWO: Zarin Hainsworth



Welcome to this report from the panel on the 'Contribution of Indigenous Women and Girls to Economic Empowerment' at CSW61. Although we are a UK member organisation, we felt that it was really important to provide a space where the voices of indigenous women could be heard. However, back in the UK it is fair to say we had a big debate about whether or not this was the right approach to take.

I personally reflected on the fact that I am a trustee of Widow's Rights International (WRI), even though I am not a widow. Instead, this is a role where I act in solidarity with widows who are fighting for recognition and rights. Likewise, I am not somebody who has been exploited into prostitution, but I still work hard to enable the voices of women who have been and continue to be personally affected by this injustice. At NAWO, we came to the conclusion that it was vital that we did create a space where we can stand in solidarity with indigenous women and where their concerns could be publically raised. It was important, therefore, that we invited a panel that could bring to life and speak from personal experiences. We are very privileged that **Cherry Smiley** - Nlaka'pamux (Thompson) and Dine' (Navajo); **Christine Stark** - Anishinaabe/Cherokee; **Justina Mutale** – Zambia; and **Sarah Burr** – Wiradjuri agreed to bring their own unique indigenous perspectives to this event. We also welcome, **Nuala Nagle** who discusses her work with indigenous communities in Haiti and **Bonnie Williams** who brings a youth perspective to the issue. The panel concludes with some thoughts from **Emma Jones** who asks some philosophical questions about the meaning of empowerment for indigenous women and girls.

Executive Summary

The speeches in this report provide rich resource of information, data and experiences about indigenous women and economic empowerment. Perhaps most striking are the consistencies between the references to the legacies of colonialism on the lived experiences of contemporary indigenous women, irrespective of where they may be in the world. For all of our indigenous speakers, the fundamental issue of access to traditional lands and land rights rings loud and clear. This is an issue that connects spirituality and community and lays the grounds for sustainable economic, social and political empowerment. Colonialism is significant to this issue in both direct and indirect ways: Directly, the seizing of land and its associated 'wealth' of resources by violence meant, and continues to mean, that indigenous communities are dispossessed of their birth right. As our speakers so eloquently trace, this dispossession leads to a number of issues, including homelessness and its intersecting injustices. Perhaps less directly but just as significantly, the legacy of colonialism has also painted indigenous people as 'others' who are somehow less than their European-settler counterparts. These are ideas we see reflected today in the designating of all indigenous children as 'special needs' in Dakota, and the imposition of top-down policies that 'do to' rather than 'work with' Aboriginal communities in Australia.

A second common theme that emerges from this panel is the intersection of colonialism with Capitalist economic systems. We are presented with numerous examples of the ways this plays out in the construction of indigenous women as an inferior dehumanised others. Through this lens, we are able to see how women may become commodified and subsequently prostituted and/or trafficked. The disproportionate numbers of indigenous women in these industries is evidence of these links.

While there is plenty to be concerned about, these injustices and challenges have also shone a light on the indigenous women who have historically confronted these systems and who continue to challenge them today. The women on our panel bring a sense of history to this struggle for economic empowerment, which grounds itself not in individual aspirations for greater wealth and success but in the fight against patriarchy and structures of oppression which affect women at a community, tribe and at an international level. In their articulations of empowerment from an indigenous perspective, our panellists challenge the increasingly prevalent neoliberal ideas of what it means to be an empowered woman or girl in the world. Indigenous women know they are already empowered; we hear how they have fought wars, (even if history has forgotten them), lead communities (even if this goes unrecognised by the state) and continue to protest inequalities (even when governments try to hood-wink them into believing they are acting in the best interests of indigenous women).

Before we ask how to contribute to the economic empowerment of indigenous women, we first have to ask how we might be denying their empowerment. Our panellists are clear that a deficit approach to empowerment, which assumes indigenous women to be disempowered, has the potential to become an additional violence. It has been said empowerment is not a zero-sum game, and that one group gaining empowerment does not mean that another must become disempowered. However, as this panel has shown, structural inequalities in the form of colonialism, patriarchy or neoliberalism, have very real disempowering effects for indigenous women and girls. Changing these structures will require shifts in power dynamics that implicate all of us who work with, and on behalf of, women around the world.

Please do take the time to read the full text speeches from each of our panellists in the report below.

Verbatim Full Text of Panel Speeches

Sarah Burr



Hello everyone. Good morning. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, especially to elders past and present. In particular, I also acknowledge the aunties and sisters who lead these communities with such strength. My name is Sarah Burr and I am from Australia. I am a Wiradjuri Aboriginal woman and I'm here at CSW representing the YWCA. I am going to talk about the contribution of Indigenous women and girls to the economy from the Australian perspective; because that is the perspective I come from as I have not lived in other countries, but I have lived in different Aboriginal communities in Australia.

I thought I might begin by giving you a very brief overview of the Australian context because I'm not certain how many of you will be aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and life back home. In Australia, we're considered the oldest living peoples in the world. We have scientific evidence that puts us at about 60,000 years old but we know and our stories tell us that we have been here since the beginning of time. So, that's significantly longer than 60,000 years! Zarin, I thought it was quite interesting in your introduction that you mentioned that the UK has been conquered by many peoples, because in Australia, we feel that the UK conquered us. During the colonial period in Australia, the British, Irish, Scottish and other European countries were quite intent on discovering the riches that our country had at that time. This included 'more space' for the people who were crammed into Europe. For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (who weren't known that way at the time) of Australia the colonial project brought with it an enormous amount of upheaval and trauma that is still felt today. We've had policies that have removed people from their country – when Aboriginal people are removed from their traditional lands this is the same as them being removed from their country. This disconnection from our land, our waters and experience of families being broken-up during the 'stolen generations'¹ has led to intergenerational trauma that we are still dealing with and recovering from. People are still trying to find their families; they are still making their way back home to their traditional lands. We are reawakening our traditional languages. For Australia to be considered 'the lucky country' in colonial language, it has been anything but for First Nations peoples. I don't tell you this to make you feel guilty per se, it is more to give you some context for the rest of my talk today.

So, what contribution do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to the economy?

Well, it is actually quite huge! But before I do that, I want to tell you something about the different traditional life paths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. We have a massive programme in Australia called 'Closing the Gap', and its main aim is to reduce the gap between the life expectancy and experiences that non-Indigenous people enjoy and bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to that point. A lot of that gap reduction rests on the strength of Aboriginal women leading our communities. The two elements to this are: Women perform

¹ This is the policy that removed children who were often the product of rape and other social injustices, from their families because they were not seen as 'full blood' – a really offensive term.

the majority of care work and informal labour. This includes looking after kids and ensuring safe communities. A lot of our Nana's have a massive role to play in this regard. Our Nana's refers to our grandmothers as well as our mothers and aunties and our senior women. This is especially true with regards to safety and alcohol abuse; bringing families back together and sending children to school and looking after grandchildren, nieces, nephews and so on, particularly for children whose parents might be in lock-up (jail). So, this role is totally unpaid with a lack of significant funding from the government. These women are taking on these roles because they love their communities. They want to see a strong, healthy, safe, happy community. What is significant about this unpaid contribution is that it saves the Australian government a lot of money. If these women were not voluntarily taking on these roles; if this grassroots action was not taking place, there would be the need for all sorts of expensive programmes and direct funding. Added to this, any top-down alternative would be much less likely to meet the needs of each individual community. We have over 250 different Aboriginal communities in Australia, let alone languages, dialects and the individual histories of each of those communities.

So, in addition to the central services that women contribute to and thereby saving the Australian economy money, there is also the formal contribution. There has recently been a great deal of research in this area, largely thanks to the [Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy and Research \(CAEPR\)](#), which is at the Australian National University in Canberra where I live. A lot of the contribution they have been able to quantify is to do with Indigenous women-owned businesses and employment. They have also begun to trace the economic contribution of these women back into their communities, specifically in terms of the financial security of families. Indigenous women-run businesses run slightly differently to their non-Indigenous counterparts. They tend to have a much bigger community focus. Ninety cents of every dollar earned by an Aboriginal woman goes back to her family and community; the emphasis is on the collective rather than the individual. We're not starting these businesses to make ourselves rich; we're doing this to look after our communities. A lot of this focus comes from traditional roots and community governance that has grown and been passed on over 60,000-plus years. This style of governance influences everything from the economic focus to how we make decisions and what that means for the benefits to people involved.

I am running out of time, so I will conclude by addressing some of the biggest barriers that remain to be faced. The first is concerned with superannuation (pension). At its most basic, a woman not being able to access superannuation is a serious concern. The second is that the form of support offered by the government to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is not fit for purpose in the changing world of work. Education remains a key issue for women, both in terms of access and quality, if women are going to be empowered to take on work in the formal economy.

Cherry Smiley



Hello everybody, and thank you for inviting me to speak here today. So, before I begin, I need to acknowledge the traditional owners of these lands. It is truly beautiful here. I am Cherry Smiley and I come from the Nlaka'pamux (Thompson) nation which is in British Columbia, Canada as well as the Dine' (Navajo) nation here in the United States. The group that I am a co-founder and active member of is IWASI, which stands for ['Indigenous Women Against the Sex Industry'](#). Our focus in

Canada is about prostitution as a form of colonisation and violence and we educate the public about that violence and find ways to restore traditional world views and values which respect and value women. I'm going to start by talking about some of the barriers that indigenous women and girls in Canada are facing, but before I do that I want to question this idea of economic empowerment. As a feminist, and working with indigenous women we have to recognise that we are working in very neoliberal times. Capitalism is generally accepted as something that has always been here and always will be, and I think that this is a major problem. So, I think that this idea of economic stability, and the questioning of how we find ways for indigenous women to participate and be successful in a Capitalist system is a question we may need to face in the short term, but in the long term we also have to think about how we decolonise the idea of economic stability and empowerment. This may mean trying to shift away from the idea of how much money we can accumulate, towards questions which focus on how we gain access to the things we need in order to survive. And, how do we do that ethical and respectful to the people around us as well as to the earth, the skies and the waters that sustain us. Capitalism was imposed upon indigenous peoples in Canada and other peoples around the world, so we know that there are alternatives. This is something that I think we always need to keep in the back of our minds. I also want to mention a quick story about this idea of empowerment. I was at a conference and there was an indigenous woman there who was living in Yellowknife (Canada) and she questioned this whole idea of empowerment because she thought that 'if somebody was going to come and empower me, then somebody can also disempower me'. For her, empowerment was something that came from within, but also something that was connected to other women, collectivity and culture. So empowerment could come from all of these sources, but it wasn't dependent on others to 'give' her empowerment.

So, since the invasion of Canada by white men indigenous women have been subjected to horrific violence. One of those forms of violence was prostitution, which was a form of violence that was brought over with colonialism and imposed on indigenous women. That is not to say that indigenous communities were idealistic and perfect and that there was no violence pre the colonial invasion. Just that the world view and fundamental values that our communities had were different. We didn't live in a Capitalist system, it was not tied to a Capitalist form of patriarchy that we have today. There was a different way of connecting and relating to each other and the natural world. So indigenous women today in Canada are facing lifetimes of violence; violence that starts from when we are born and continues through our lives as we grow into women. Statistical analysis of indigenous women's experiences in Canada found that we're six times more likely to be murdered than non-indigenous women. A recent 2016 study found that indigenous children in the province of British Columbia (where I'm from) are grossly over represented in the foster care system. The study found that even though indigenous children make up less than 2-3% of the population, they comprise 50% (an even split of boys 25% and girls 25%) of the children in the foster care system. Of the 25% which are girls in the foster care system, over 60% if those girls have been sexually abused while in the foster care system.

If we look at these histories of violence, and recognise that they start from the time when indigenous girls are very young we need to understand life trajectories in terms of what is needed to survive. So, indigenous girls and women are overrepresented in prostitution, in part because it is presented as a viable form of employment to us. And the violence that happens in prostitution is absolutely horrific, but I think it's important to remember that the violence does not start and end there. It happens both

within and outside of the sex industry and can happen to any and all women and girls irrespective of how economically stable they are; we are still vulnerable to this violence. I just want to note here that in Canada, we have a tendency to focus on the victims of violence rather than on the perpetrators of violence. Who is doing the violence and why? We need a feminist analysis to understand the roots of this form of violence so that we are not just looking at the vulnerability of women, but to the threats from violence. I am currently a PhD student in Canada, but when I was doing my Masters' I experienced male violence. So, this level of education or having a good economic situation will not protect you from this type of violence. So, we can see that education alone is not a guarantee that women can live life free from violence.

Just to finish, women and girls in Canada are facing high levels of violence and extreme poverty. A common phrase is 'homeless in our own homelands'. And, I think that at the heart of the challenges we face is an economic model that needs to be challenged. We need to look at it as a colonising force. Doing so will require some difficult questions of ourselves, potentially painful honesty and it's going to require all of us to give things up.

Christine Stark



Hello everyone. So, I'm just going to jump right in because it feels like what I have to say is a whole book that is just milling about inside of me. Thank you everyone for being here, for the invitation and these wonderful speakers.

In the United States, American Indian and Native women make 58 cents to the white man's dollar. This figure of 58 cents is also less than what white women make, which is a disparity we should also keep in mind. In South Dakota, and this will mirror what Cherry has already said, Native American people make up 15% of the population and 55% of the foster care system; a primary site in child trafficking. So, along with the \$100 million that the state makes from these children, each foster family gets a \$4,000 'adaptive incentive' for each child and a \$10,000 incentive if a child is deemed to have special needs. And, guess what the state of South Dakota does, it classifies all Native American children as 'special needs' off the top.

So, Native American people experience the highest rate of violence of any group in the United States. They have the highest rate of gun-related violence and the highest rate of violence committed against them by perpetrators who are drunk. So, one of the things that I think is most important to think about when we are talking about these issues is 'projection': Who is the savage? Who are the drunks? Who are violent? We find then, that all of this behaviour, if we can talk about it within such a big category of European men and European culture, has been projected on indigenous people.

From the moment of contact, up until the early 1900s there was a 92% drop in indigenous population in the United States; wiped out through murder, warfare and disease. So, Native American women in the United States have the highest rates of violence committed against them, even compared to other minority groups. Is this all Native American men because they are drunk and violent? No. The primary

perpetrators of violence against Native American women are white men. We also have extremely high rates of Native women being used in prostitution and trafficking. And again, who are the primary buyers of these women, white middle-class straight men. What we have then, are ongoing struggles of social and political power that get turned into 'those drunk Indians'; 'they're fighting all the time' 'they're violent' and all the other stereotypes that are lumped onto Native people and other groups in the United States.

Does anyone know who the first sex trafficker/slaver was on this land? Christopher Columbus. While running around and taking gold and other wealth from our lands, he and other white European colonisers wiped out entire populations in the Caribbean and carted off indigenous women and girls, selling them into sex trafficking. So that is what we are celebrating when we celebrate Christopher Columbus. The other thing that I really want to talk about, because my primary area of work is on prostitution, trafficking and pornography especially in the Native community, is wealth. Native American people are among the poorest in this country and have the highest rates of homelessness. So what is this connection? Well, what is wealth based on – and I'm not going to go into all the things that Cherry has already said here, because I totally agree with them – wealth is based on land. As I look out of the window at the building labelled 'Trump', we can see that this is true for (Mr) Trump; who inherited his wealth from his father, who inherited it from his grandfather who was involved in prostitution and sex trafficking. If we were to look into that, I am certain we would find indigenous women included in that. So, we need to talk about land; land that was taken, or land exchanged in treaties that were never honoured. WE have the indigenous people who once inhabited this land with more than 500 different tribal cultures and sophisticated languages and cultures. Despite what we see in the popular culture of Westerns where the only thing we are likely to find is the Indian standing there saying 'How'. Just think about the message that this send out to people. Native men in ceremonies will often say this to make fun out of it, but the Anishinaabe language is actually recognised in the Guinness Book of World Records as one of the most complex and difficult languages to learn in the world because of its complexity of thought and structure. So these were the kinds of things that were wiped out or suppressed (or are still alive and resurging) and yet are still portrayed as being savage and unsophisticated and uncivilised.

So, as I previously mentioned we have extremely high rates of homelessness among Native people. If anyone is interested you can look up, '[Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota](#)'. I was one of the researchers and co-authors and it was one of the first studies that conducted on Native women involved in prostitution and trafficking. We interviewed 105 Native women in Minnesota who were involved and found that 98% of the women we spoke to were currently or previously homeless. That is a huge piece of the puzzle for understanding why they are at where they are at. And they are homeless because they do not have money to support themselves and their children and they don't have money because we have centuries of systematic and institutionalised discrimination, oppression and suppression of Native people, and Native women in particular. So the education system, to be frank, sucks for Native people. We have low rates of graduation due to racism, past histories of boarding schools and with education unless you inherit your wealth – and if you're Native you're not going to inherit your wealth because your land was taken from you and it is now owned by people like Trump – means that you're not going to have a way to take care of yourself and your children. Add into that all of the violence and the ways that Native women are targeted,

particularly by white men but also by other groups of men. Because of the legal system that we're under and jurisdictional issues we have something that is beyond an uphill battle to achieve basic rights to safety, a home and a job. And what happens in my community in Minneapolis, and particularly Duluth, Minnesota, the white culture around you looks at you as if you're a 'squaw', and 'squaw' means prostitute. So, you have this huge system around you that has been here for a few hundred years and works to keep you out. The perception is that you shouldn't be there, and that you are at where you at, because of some internal characteristic flaw that may be racial or a woman, or something else. It is quite a system is set up.

To finish up, individualised labour within a Capitalist system is obviously part of what is needed in the paid workforce. But what we need to talk about in relation to indigenous women issues is resources as a source of wealth: minerals, copper, food, lumber, domesticated and wild animals. We have all of these ways, particularly when European men came over and through the lens of Christianity; they saw Native people and Native women in particular as wild animals. In comparison, they came to see African American people as domesticated animals or work-beasts. And so, when you have a group of people who are placed into a Capitalist structure as animals they become commodities. I would argue that Native people in this country are essentially commodities, where our treaties were not upheld and we are forced to live within someone else's system of hierarchy that did not have to do with traditional values. There was a book that came out in the spring, in which a historian went through and compiled numbers of slaves which showed the number of enslaved Native peoples as well as what would come to be known as African American people. His numbers were, 5 million Native people enslaved. So, when we're talking about current situations and especially the prostitution and trafficking of women, we have to see it as an extension of that history of colonisation and the 'attempted' genocide. Because we're still here, and we're still living our lives according to traditional values and we're living in this world too.

Bonnie Williams



Firstly I would like to thank NAWO for giving me the opportunity and accrediting me to speak on the subject of the challenges which young indigenous women face at this years' conference.

I believe that together, poverty and the lack of access to education leading to less Indigenous women having skills to enter the workplace are two of the biggest challenges that are facing young indigenous women today.

Education and learning have been something that women have fought for against gender discrimination. Many young children and a considerably higher percentage of them being girls still struggle to attain the right to an education. This struggle for education is heightened by belonging to a Indigenous tribe or community.

Indigenous people's right to education is protected by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which states their rights to education regarding the historical, social, cultural and economic circumstances of Indigenous people. Yet even though these rights are said to be protected by

many universal organisations there is a huge education gap between Indigenous people and the mainstream population.

In Bolivia, the most recent census records that 62% of the population categorized themselves as Indigenous. Bolivia's largest indigenous group are the Quechua and the Aymara and both are considered to be high-land people. 30% of Bolivia's population live in rural areas, and in these areas a shocking 80% are found to be living in poverty. In 2006 the 80th president of Bolivia was elected and is the first Bolivian president to come from the indigenous population. He has focused on reducing the levels of poverty in Bolivia, and in December 2015 a new Bolivian partnership with the World Bank established objectives to help eradicate poverty completely.

Education in Bolivia reinforces the knowledge that men are more commonly educated than women which seems far more noticeable among the indigenous population. The high illiteracy rate of indigenous women makes it increasingly difficult for them to learn Spanish which is the dominant language. This stops them being able to participate in the labour market.

There are many noticeable disadvantages women in Bolivia face, which can be seen when cross comparing social structures. For example, the substantial pay gaps noted between gender and ethnic based groups and between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples across Latin American countries. These can be attributed to the differences in educational attainment between men and women as well as Indigenous and non-indigenous people.

World-wide there is a huge lack of indigenous women in high-paid and decision making jobs which could be an indication of the lack of available education or opportunity to attend school. It is a well-known fact that higher school attendance equates to better educational achievement, yet social discrimination may not be the only factor that leaves indigenous women with poor attendance in school. Aboriginal students are the highest risk group for attendance in Western Australia. Cultural differences at home may have a huge impact on student's attendance at school and the culture clash could be difficult for families to accept, which could cause tensions between family and school life. There may be cultural practices that these young adults need to partake in which disrupts their education as well as commitments at home such as care for family members. All of these put pressure on Aboriginal pupils to juggle both commitments, often feeling obliged to stick to their roots, letting their education fall behind.

Education doesn't only provide knowledge but allows safe investment for the future. The equal education especially for women alongside their male counterparts is critical in the abolition of patriarchy and the rise in women's role and their involvement in economic, social and political roles of power. In Australia for example, after 116 years of Parliament and thousands and thousands of parliamentarians, in 2016 the first indigenous woman was elected to the House of Representatives. How can it have taken 116 years for this step in Australian parliament? In 2016 the gender of the House of Representatives candidates shows that there are 316 women to 678 men. This figure shows the lack of representation that women, and even more so, Indigenous women have on a political level, which in turn leaves women at a disadvantage. Not only is this gender gap found in Australia but demonstrated by current statistics that show that 104 women hold seats in the United States Congress comprising 19.4% of the 535 members. Seeing these statistics, it is no wonder women have less of a say. That is only 104 women.

These young women's challenges are made worse by the higher poverty levels of indigenous compared to non-indigenous peoples. Higher poverty levels enhance the daily challenges Indigenous women face as their basic human needs can't be met. The neglect of Indigenous tribes and communities has only worsened their situation and made it harder for indigenous people to integrate themselves into mainstream society, placing them in a cycle of an inability to find work resulting in the continued poor living conditions. The Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development tracks child poverty rates internationally. These statistics show the higher levels of poverty in which the Indigenous children live. For example there are three tiers of child poverty in Canada. The 1st tier which excludes indigenous, racialized and immigrant children holds a poverty rate at 12%. The 3rd tier holds status First Nation child poverty rates at a shocking 50%. Half of these children are considered to live in poverty. These statistics demonstrate the huge poverty gap between Indigenous and Non-indigenous children in Canada. Regionally the most poverty stricken areas for Indigenous children are the prairie provinces of Manitoba, where nearly two thirds, which equates to 62%, are living below the poverty line. This compares to the 15% of non-indigenous people in the same province. This level of disadvantage simply cannot continue.

Women need to start being heard more. It is no secret that men and women are different, that is fact, yet why should that equate to inequality. I believe this way of thinking should be transferred onto indigenous people. Yes indigenous people are culturally different but why should they encounter higher inequalities? This level of inequality is especially true for women? so lastly, I implore that everyone here pressure their authorities to instate better opportunities which can enable all indigenous communities to have access to education and have a higher quality of life.

Thank you.

Nuala Nagle



Good morning everyone. First of all I just wanted to thank, NAWO and UN Women for accrediting me at CSW. I also want to thank all of the other speakers. I find myself chilled to hear these stark facts, and I'm sure that many of you may feel similarly. As Zarin has said I'm going to speak about identity and belonging, and specifically to connecting with indigenous heritage through the arts. I'll be speaking specifically about a project that I have been involved with in the north of Haiti. I'm originally from Ireland, which has its own unique cultural heritage and I have a particular interest in indigenous cultures which is why I have chosen to wear this West African outfit, because Haitian people were originally from West Africa. In making this choice, I am in no way belittling culture to be about how we dress, but to draw attention to it as one way that facet of culture. The original Haitian people were the Taíno-Arawaks people, who were Native American Indians. Just to put all of this in context, the guiding body for the Baha'is' of the world, recently published a [paper](#) which begins,

"In an increasingly interconnected world more light is being cast on the social conditions of every people giving greater visibility to their circumstances. While there are developments that give hope, there is much that should weigh heavy on the conscience of the human race. Inequity, discrimination, and exploitation blight the light of humanity, seemingly immune to

the treatments applied by political schemes of every hue. The economic impact of these afflictions has resulted in the prolonged suffering of so many, as well as in deep-seated, structural defects in society.”

I think we've heard about this from all of the previous speakers. I would first like to look quickly at the guiding principles of the project I was involved in, which are the Baha'i principles of the unity of humanity and the equality of men and women. The founder of the Baha'i faith says, "You are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch", referring to humanity as a whole and highlighting our interconnections, while also leaving space for unique diversity. So the aim of the project was to help young people express their true identity and sense of belonging through the arts. This involved study materials about the empowerment of youth; equality, unity and diversity as well as exploring Haitian indigenous culture and heritage. These were some of the key components of the project. Basically, it is arranged as a 10 day intensive summer programme which involves meeting with the young people twice a day between August and September every year. Throughout the year, the young people continue with the project; one of the young women who showed some leadership qualities has continued to work with the group during the year.

In the interests of time, I want to talk a little about major developments that have happened this year, perhaps more so than previous years. This year we started to involve young men in the programme, and that was direct feedback after coming to CSW in 2012 when the focus was on the role of young men in helping to eliminate violence against women. And this really naturally evolved in our project, because the young men had been watching the young women were really enthusiastic about the programme, and began approaching me to say that they also wanted to be a part of it. So, their inclusion has been a gradual process but I would say it brought a lot of riches to what we were doing.

I want to now go on to share two stories. One of a young girl called Mischti who was an amazing, talented dancer; a very attractive young woman who had been involved in the programme from the very beginning. Unfortunately, in the second or third year she had become pregnant a very young age and the following year when I returned to the programme, she wasn't there. So, I asked where she was and was told that Mischti had given birth and three days later her baby had died, and she had become very traumatised by this and fled to the Dominican Republic, trying to get work. So, obviously it would be a challenge to be aware of that but one thing that it did provoke us to do as a group is to look at the issue of early pregnancy. We used freeze-frame drama as a way to try and understand, unpack and reimagine another possibility. We involved the local community in participating in the freeze frame drama, where they could come and contribute solutions that might improve the issue of early pregnancy.

The other story I want to share with you is that of Shedlene, who I really hoped would have been able to come to CSW today and speaking instead of me, but that did not end up being possible. Hopefully next year, we will be able to get her to come. This year she was the one who spurred me into urgent action to return to Haiti, because I didn't really think I would have the funds to return. But, I was able to reach out to my networks and really try to get some support. And that support, I have to say, even though I approached many large institutions, the vast majority of the support for funding came from individuals.

So I suppose I want to conclude with a saying from Creole which says, “One finger can’t eat callaloo” and callaloo is a really sticky vegetable and to eat it involves the whole hand. In the photos I am about to show you. The first, you can see that many of the young people no longer really wear their traditional dress, but are influenced by Western culture. The second is from an outing we managed to put together to a local beach. Here, an image with a local artist who helped put together the programme this year at the University as a volunteer. And, I want to show these pictures because I feel that rather than thinking about role models for these women and girls being in government, role models are closer to home. They are the teachers in the school, or here, the wife of the director who is a nurse. In short it comes back to an essence of love and shared humanity in trying to work with these communities. Thank you.

Justina Mutale



Good morning everybody. Once again, I would like to thank Zarin and the National Alliance of Women’s Organisations, UN Women and everybody else involved in today’s event. I am from Zambia, which is in the Southern part of Africa and this is the context that I will talk about today. So, I have been asked to talk about African indigenous women, which I find is a bit of a challenge for me because in my opinion and what I know, unlike the US or Australia who have been taken over by sailors from other parts of the world, to me Africa still remains an indigenous population, save for a few settlers here and there. So, when I speak about African indigenous women, I think I am speaking for the majority of all African women. While we all remain indigenous, we are separated by the fact that some of our parents or grandparents have moved from the villages to the city to work, while their brothers and sisters, parents and cousins are still living a more indigenous way of life in the village. When it comes to important occasions, such as weddings, births and coming of age, although some of us have been modernised and moved into the city, we always during these special occasions revert back to our indigenous ways. We go back to our indigenous traditions and cultures that identify us as the African people. So, we are still very much indigenous – all of us. This is why in fact, in African politics there is a phrase always used, which is ‘clan-based politics’: We still have the tribes, we still have the clans.

I find that most of the characteristics defining indigenous people apply to Africa and its people as a whole when it comes to the global arena. From the history that I know, you find that survival and our way of life depends on access and rights to our own traditional land and natural resources we have there in. We also find that we are discriminated against and described as less developed. Many African countries are situated in very challenging geographical locations, and so we find that Africa and its people are exploited in politics, and in social and economic structures. There are a lot of violations of the human rights of indigenous African people, which makes up the bulk of the African population. We also have a threat, which is a threat to the continuation of our own culture and our own way of life. This then prevents us from genuinely participating in deciding our own future, which is the future of the African people as a whole.

History has depicted women from Africa, in African societies as dual minors. For the most part their story has been told through the shadow of the father and then that of their husband, but this is not true. Before the world even embarked on moves towards gender equality, of looking specifically at the status of women, most African women already carried leadership roles in their communities. From my mother's family, a woman has always since time immemorial ruled the Kingdom. We also have women's suffrage movements, whose histories have not been told. We have great women, for example legends such as Yaa Asatewaa of Ghana, who led the war of the Golden Stool (Yaa Asatewaa War) against the British trying to steal the Stool. She rose up to fight them. We have the Igbo women of Nigeria who also fought the British. We have the Princess from Ethiopia and the women from South Africa who marched to the government buildings of Pretoria to protest against government's exclusion of women.

So, we should recognise that African women have always had the power and they have always been involved in the economic life of their societies. They've been involved in farming, in trading and craft production. Given their rights and the opportunities, African indigenous women as with all African women can drive their economy. They have always-already been economically empowered, but some of this has been taken away from them. For example, they have customary land that they have owned as a birth right, but which has been taken away from them through laws which state that to be on this land you have to have title-deeds. This is something that we don't understand, and most title deeds are in fact written in English. When they were recommended in Zambia, they made a recommendation, explained how we do it and then did not stay on long enough for the implementation. This caused a great deal of confusion, which continues today. Other problems we have are infrastructure and transport. We need new ways of doing things and perhaps new technology, but overall the most important thing is to have the ownership of our land. To have the ownership of our land would mean ownership of our economy and the wealth that is our birth right. Thank you

Emma Jones



I would first like to thank Wendi Momen at UN Women for accrediting me. I would also like to thank the NAWO in the UK and particularly Zarin Hainsworth. I thank her for the act of feminist solidarity that has enabled so many people to come to CSW - and for the fact that she has bestowed upon me the label of 'youth' for the week.

As Zarin said, I am a PhD Candidate and I am actually here at CSW to research the conference. As part of my research I have been trying to understand the different ways that the word empowerment is used – whether that is in this room, by white middle-aged male bureaucrats, or young indigenous women... I have learnt a great deal about the way that we speak to each other, and sometimes the way that we speak passed each other. Over the next few minutes, I hope to find a way to speak with and not for young indigenous women, and in a way that makes use of my academic knowledge, and makes way for indigenous women to tell me when I've got it wrong!

I would also like to start with a question: How many times have you used the word empowerment this week, without even thinking about its meaning? My research asks what happens to the word empowerment, when we use it over and over and over again. What happens when we are placed in the position of “expert” who uses that word? More specifically, I am interested in what happens when we attach ‘gender’ to empowerment as with MDG 3 and SDG 5

Empowerment is one of those words that does not signify a particular object like ‘pen’ or ‘table’, rather, it is a word that has some sense of universal meaning, but which is loose enough that we can all sit around a table and have slightly different definitions. It is actually this looseness that makes empowerment an attractive word for policy makers who are trying to reach agreements. However, the more we keep using it in certain contexts the more and more one meaning becomes fixed as THE meaning. For example, ‘entrepreneur’ as a shorthand for economic empowerment. This becomes even more difficult when powerful organisations and individuals – such as the UN- take up and advocate for one particular meaning too. We must ask then, what happens to the alternative meanings of empowerment as they are understood by more marginalised actors.

I wonder at the end of this week - what do you imagine an empowered young woman to be? Does she have limitless potential that is just waiting to be released? Perhaps an empowered young person is an entrepreneur who designs and sells safe backpacks?

I want to reflect on some of the things that I have learnt about the meaning of empowerment from young indigenous women:

Empowerment is not something that starts and ends with the economy. The World Bank, UK government and UN ideas about empowerment do not reflect the experiences of young indigenous women. The reason for this is that the language used by these powerful actors is produced within the increasingly globalised economic structures that already exist. To understand alternative understandings of empowerment we need to change our relationship to macroeconomics. Neoliberalism – or Capitalist fundamentalism shapes who we are and what we think: from the need to go to university to get a “good enough job” to social norms that produce empowered young women as independent, consumers and body conscious.

From indigenous young women, I have learnt this week that it is possible for empowerment to come from an entirely different place - literally a different way of making sense of the world. This is a world which starts with a connection to the earth and to the land. It is material, but not material wealth. This empowerment has a deep spiritual power that is never individualised but collective - even when the individual is spoken of she is always already connected to those who came before her and those who will follow. Arts, oral histories, local knowledge and cultural practices are valued... not STEM and working in technological sectors.

We can learn things from the way that indigenous women understand power in empowerment. For one, by actively listening we learn about their differences but hopefully we also learn about our own. We learn that we have a position in the world when we speak of empowerment. Indeed, I want to include a moment this week where I was reminded of my own position:

After a panel with indigenous young women at the Youth Forum, I spoke with one of the panellists. We were speaking about the challenges faced by indigenous women having a different interpretation of empowerment to that commonly held at the UN and in mainstream development. Specifically, we talked about what effect they hoped to have on negotiations. I was told that they could not even influence the statement of their regional Latin American bloc. When I suggested that this was quite disempowering, I was swiftly corrected.

I was told: We recognise that this is the way the UN-speak. We come and we speak their language while we are here and every year we can we try to make interventions - small interventions - and this year after years of work here we are the emerging theme issue. This would not be possible without our mothers who came before us and we do this work not on behalf of ourselves, but for those women who will come after us. For us, the power is with us when we return to our communities with this UN knowledge. With this knowledge we know better how to support and protect our communities when donors come and tell us they will help to empower us. We are able to understand their need for compliance and due diligence, but we are also able to demonstrate that we can implement our own projects, and we will dictate the indicators that tell us about impact.

We can speak both languages.

I want to conclude with a reflection on my own position here as an academic and increasingly... as an activist: I am provoked more and more often to consider the ways that I can use my knowledge and my platform to advocate for indigenous sisters, and other marginalised voices. We say it all the time, but more academics need to leave their ivory tower institutions and visit grassroots organisations, and more need to know that this CSW platform exists. We need to find ways to acknowledge our differences, and accept that we each hold political, social, economic and identity positions that are not innate, but are a product of our own cultural values, beliefs and life experiences. There is power in empowerment, but we need to have honest, open and perhaps even painful dialogue that reveals our assumptions and lays a more equitable policy groundwork for the sustainable development of all women and girls.

