

ECHOES OF HER!

The Weight She
Carries

The Strength
She Builds

MAY 2026

From Awareness to Action: Your Role in Ending
Discrimination & Violence Against Women



The Professor

Ivy N Josiah



Ivy N Josiah is a Malaysian women's human rights advocate and a gender consultant cum educator. Ivy is the former President and Executive Director of Women's Aid Organisation (WAO– www.wao.org.my), where over 20 years she developed WAO's shelter services and advocacy strategies for law and policy reform. WAO opened Malaysia's first shelter for survivors of domestic violence in 1982.

She has a strong background in women's human rights addressing multiple forms of discrimination against women and has conducted training in over 15 countries. She currently serves on four international boards on women's rights and remains active in civil society. Ivy is also a member of Five Arts Centre.

She loves to advocate, dance, cook and create.

The Editors



I feel filled with inspiration and courage to be part of this project, which brings together women working for the same cause all around the world. This issue is a reminder of women's strength, resilience, and brilliance. The future is female and the future is bright. Believe in yourself, take the leap and together we have the power to change the world!

Semanur Yeşiltepe
Türkiye



This project feels both inspiring and politically significant, bringing together voices across lived experiences who are collectively challenging systems of exclusion and inequality. At a time when conversations around safety, representation, labour, identity, and bodily autonomy remain urgent, this becomes an act of both resistance and hope. Believe in your voice, take up space unapologetically, challenge what excludes and build what heals.

Sparsh Patlan
India



It's undoubtedly remarkable how female voices connect beyond borders. As you'll read through our words you may find a connection you didn't know about or you may even experience moments of distress, amusement and empowerment. I invite you to read this issue with an open heart. As we are powerful, resilient, nonconformist and free spirits.

Valeria Bonilla T.
Ecuador

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The words we live by: How language shapes silence and change

Dr. O. Myagmarsuren, Mongolia

Some of the most influential ideas reside in the subtle patterns of language. In Mongolia, as in many cultures, language not only reflects but also shapes how reality is perceived. A common expression, “men stand with men,” is widely accepted, yet an equivalent affirmation of women’s solidarity is rarely articulated. This absence, though seemingly minor, carries deeper implications.

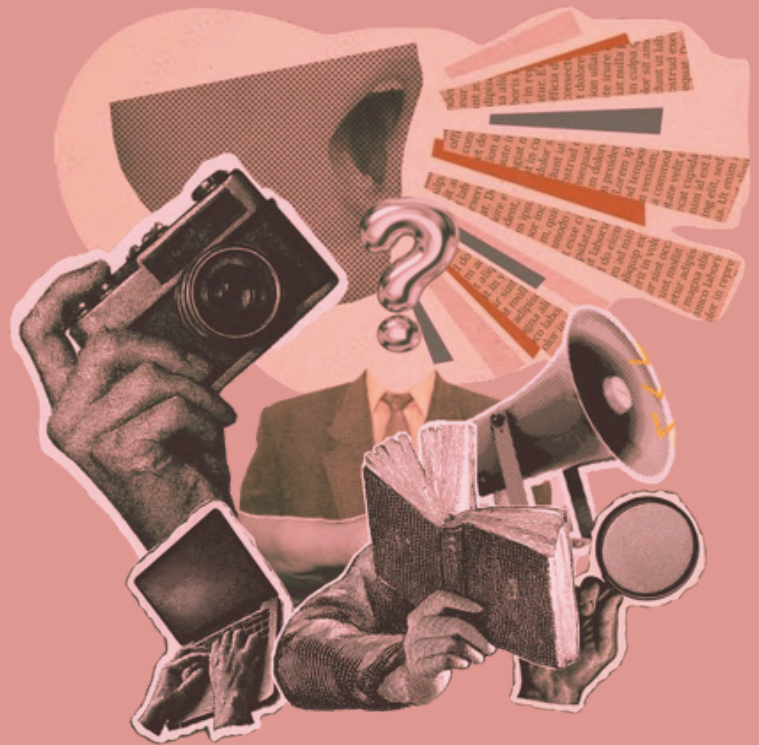
Language does not merely describe reality; it actively constructs it. The repetition of certain expressions normalizes particular social relations, while omissions render alternatives invisible. Over time, such silences can naturalize inequality, even when it is unjust. Although contemporary discussions on discrimination and violence against women are gaining visibility, awareness alone is insufficient. If everyday language continues to reflect unequal support, transformation remains incomplete. Some of the most influential ideas reside in the subtle patterns of language. In Mongolia, as in many cultures, language not only reflects but also shapes how reality is perceived.



A common expression, “men stand with men,” is widely accepted, yet an equivalent affirmation of women’s solidarity is rarely articulated. This absence, though seemingly minor, carries deeper implications.

Language does not merely describe reality; it actively constructs it. The repetition of certain expressions normalizes particular social relations, while omissions render alternatives invisible. Over time, such silences can naturalize inequality, even when it is unjust. Although contemporary discussions on discrimination and violence against women are gaining visibility, awareness alone is insufficient. If everyday language continues to reflect unequal support, transformation remains incomplete.

Addressing discrimination requires attention not only to policy but also to daily discourse, the way roles are described, the way jokes are framed, and the way support is expressed. Even small linguistic shifts can open space for more equitable ways of thinking. In educational contexts, this is especially evident. Classrooms function not only as sites of knowledge transmission but also as spaces where meanings are negotiated.



When students critically engage with language and recognize embedded biases, they begin to reimagine social norms.

Revising linguistic expressions does not reject culture; rather, it enables its evolution. By adopting expressions that reflect equality, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, we contribute to gradual but meaningful change. Transformation does not always begin with overt actions; it often starts with the words we choose. As language changes, so does the world we help to shape.

Authors quote: “The words we use, and those we omit, shape what we accept as normal.”





Chain Reaction: Louder than Silence

Purity Thubi, Kenya

I follow the rules, I keep quiet, I submit, I nurture, I guide, I give and do so much more. I do all these not once not twice but over and over yet I am still not heard, I am not listened to, I am overlooked and underestimated but now I have made a choice to make a change and start a chain reaction because I am unmuted, I am louder than the silence. I know my worth and my value despite the challenges I face. I stand firm and make the choice to fight for equality and creation of an environment where all can flourish and bring out our common humanity. I don't need to be rude; I don't need to be quiet; I don't need to shout because I already understand that my voice matters.

I am now aware that I need to speak out my opinion because I am not only defending myself but also because my voice is going to benefit and bring about positive change in the society.

So now I embrace my voice and stand firm by the opinions that I feel and without doubt agree that they can make a true change. Many may not agree nor even see eye to eye with me but that's okay. I am now aware that I deserve to be heard a resounding call for equality. Indeed, I am louder than silence.



Breaking Barriers: Gender, Leadership, and Resilience in School Administration

Rita Tiwari, Nepal

I joined Padma Kanya Vidyashram Secondary School located in Kathmandu, Nepal as the principal 13 years ago when I was 37 years old. Although this opportunity was a big milestone in my career, it came with some challenges, which I had not anticipated. My colleagues were older and more experienced and some, especially male teachers, did not believe that I could lead. They were skeptical not just because of my age, but also based on the deeply rooted perceptions of women in leadership that had been instilled in the society.

I had to deal with different types of resistance, underestimation, neglect, and even downright disrespect. It even went as far as trying to take me out of the job, on basis of the idea that a woman would not be able to run such an institution effectively. These experiences were an indication of a bigger problem in our society and women tend to be hindered in their growth and leadership positions.



Nevertheless, I stood firm. My self-confidence, love of education and determination became the driving force. Instead of responding to negativity, I worked on trust-building by acting consistently, collaborating, and having a common vision of school improvement. Gradually, perceptions began to change.

The significant change occurs in school due to collaboration and cooperation of the school teachers, parents and community. This experience showed me that there is no gender-based leadership, but it is a commitment, stand, and the capacity to inspire others.

My experience points out an important fact: women might have more barriers to overcome, but they are not impossible. Success can be achieved with clear objectives, perseverance and supportive teamwork. We must keep pushing the boundaries of societal norms and provide the space in which women can lead without bias, and serve as full participants in the development of our institutions and communities.

“There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish.” — Michelle Obama

Always Fight Back

Tiana, Serbia



The more we don't talk about this topic, the less chance we have of doing anything. None of us knows what happens behind other people's closed doors, and that is why it is necessary that, if we are in a situation to help, we do so in any way.

The institutions of the country where I live are not working. The law hardly exists. That is why the help of man to man has never been more important. As a professor, it is my duty to respond to any form of abuse. As a woman, I have to be ready to protect myself, because sometimes I hardly succeed. As a mother, I protect my daughter at the cost of ending up in prison. Maybe this is not the text you expect, but it is mine.

Inequality Is Not a Gap. It Is a Design.

Anmol Beniwal, India

We call it a “gap,” as if it appeared by accident. It didn’t. Gender inequality is built quietly into everyday systems—at work, at home, and even on a simple playground.

In India, the pattern begins early. A group of boys occupies a public playground, and when girls ask for space to train, they are told to leave—because “boys are playing.” Sometimes, even during practice, girls are asked to stop and walk away the moment boys arrive. No argument. No resistance. Just silence.

But the question is simple:

If that playground is built for citizens, are girls not citizens?

The most dangerous part is not the act—it is the acceptance. Society treats this as normal. And when inequality becomes normal, it becomes invisible.

This silence follows women into classrooms, workplaces, and leadership spaces. It shapes confidence, limits ambition, and quietly erases potential.

Real change does not begin with policies alone. It begins when this silence is broken—when someone refuses to step aside.

Because equality is not about waiting for permission.

It is about claiming space, raising voices, and standing firm—

for every girl who was told to leave,
for every dream that was paused,
and for a future that must no longer be negotiated.





The Work We Don't See

Berna Osorio, Philippines

In many Filipino homes, the day begins before sunrise, not with alarms, but with mothers preparing meals, cleaning spaces, and caring for everyone else before themselves. This is unpaid care work, and it is everywhere. Yet, it is often invisible.

Discrimination against women does not always look like violence or exclusion. Sometimes, it looks like an expectation. The expectation that women will “naturally” take on caregiving roles. The expectation that their labor is love, not work. The expectation that they should carry the burden quietly.

My role in eliminating this discrimination begins at home. It starts with recognizing that care is work. It continues with sharing responsibilities, washing dishes, helping with siblings, or simply acknowledging the effort behind everyday tasks. Small actions challenge deeply rooted norms.

But it does not end there. As a young person, I can use my voice, online and offline, to raise awareness. Through conversations, social media, and community engagement, I can help shift mindsets. Because when we start naming the problem, we begin changing it.

Eliminating discrimination against women means valuing what has long been ignored. It means ensuring that care work is seen, respected, and shared.

Change does not always begin in big spaces. Sometimes, it begins in the quiet routines of our homes, when we choose to see, to act, and to stand for equality.

Her Crime? Wanting to Feed Her Children: The Ban on Afghan Women's Employment

Madiha Safi, Afghanistan

Sitting roadside, the autumn wind hurt her eyes, was Hadia—a 43-year-old, the former teacher for ten years—polishing shoes to earn mere coins. She didn't choose this. The Taliban did. Upon taking Kabul, the school was shut where she spent years, teaching girls and boys. Her husband lost his job. Her daughter, a government clerk, was displaced. Their modest financial stability was erased in weeks. Their son dropped out of computer studies. And Hadia—an educated woman with a teaching degree, now begs for dignity in the dust, because her children were starving.

This is not destitution. This is economic strangulation enforced by decree. The Taliban banned women from employment in all sectors; NGOs, government agencies, and the private sphere. No work for widows. No supplemental work for wives to help their husband in family expenses. Families cannot subsist on one man's wages in an imploding economy, but millions of Afghan women were made unemployable. Hadia's message is clear: "The Taliban have to allow women to go to work. They have to create jobs." Till now, it is so clear that the government will not do anything about this issue.

Hence, what can we do? Awareness demands that all should know her struggle. Action means we fund home-based enterprises or businesses, support direct cash-transfer projects for widows, and lobby for the prosecution of gender apartheid as an international crime. She polishes shoes to keep his family out from extreme poverty and starvation today. The least we can do is refuse to look away and resolve to rewrite her fate.



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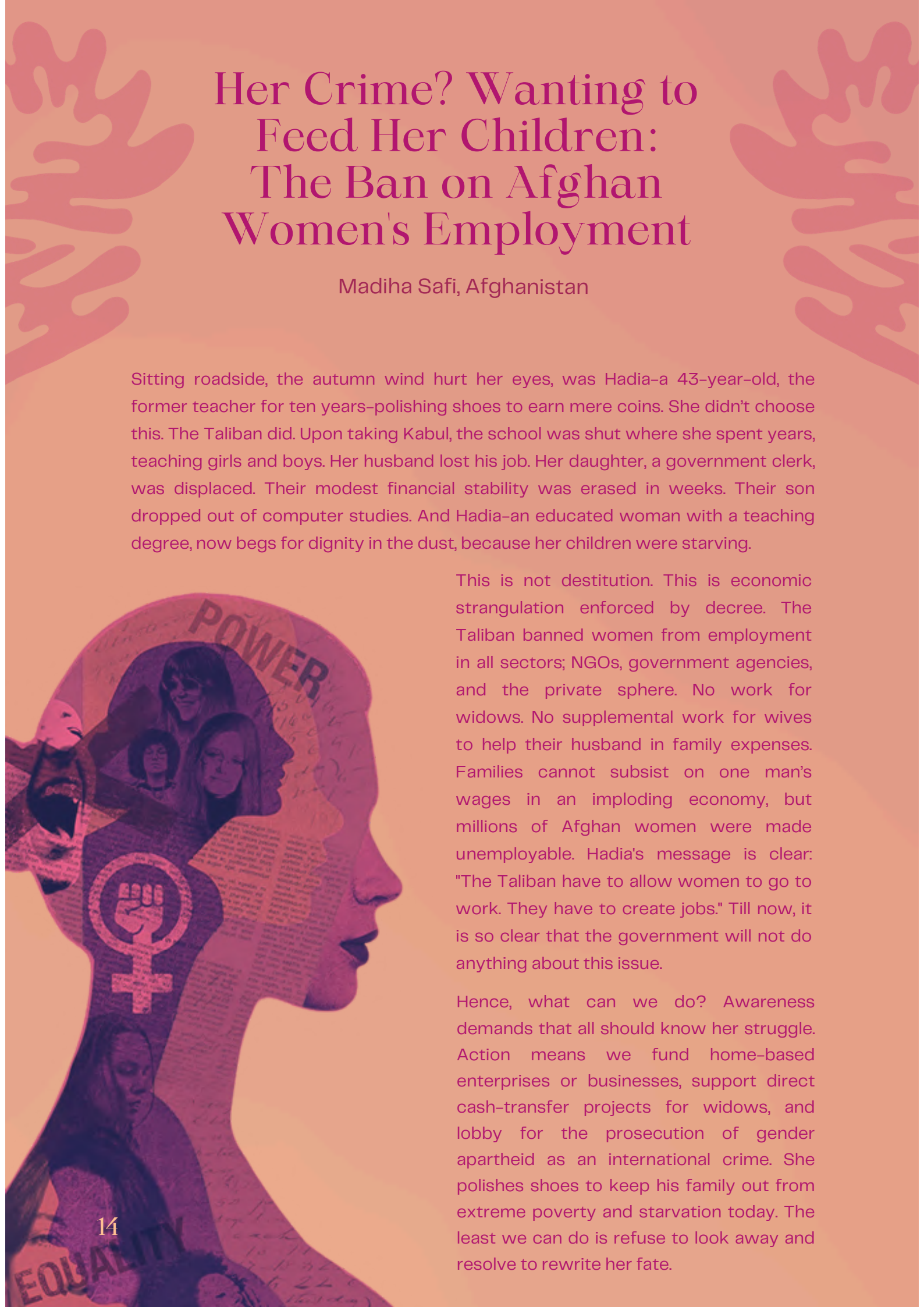
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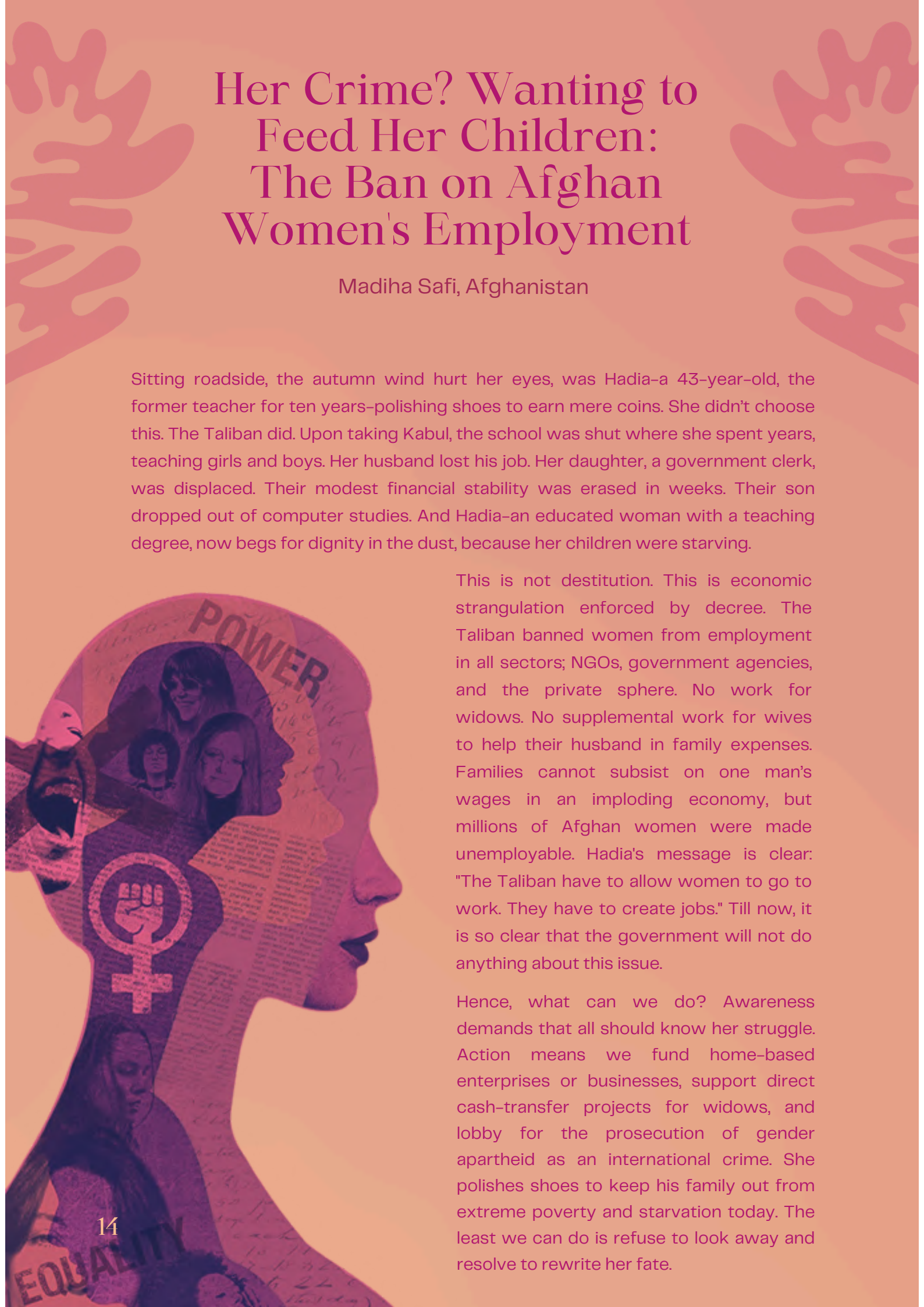
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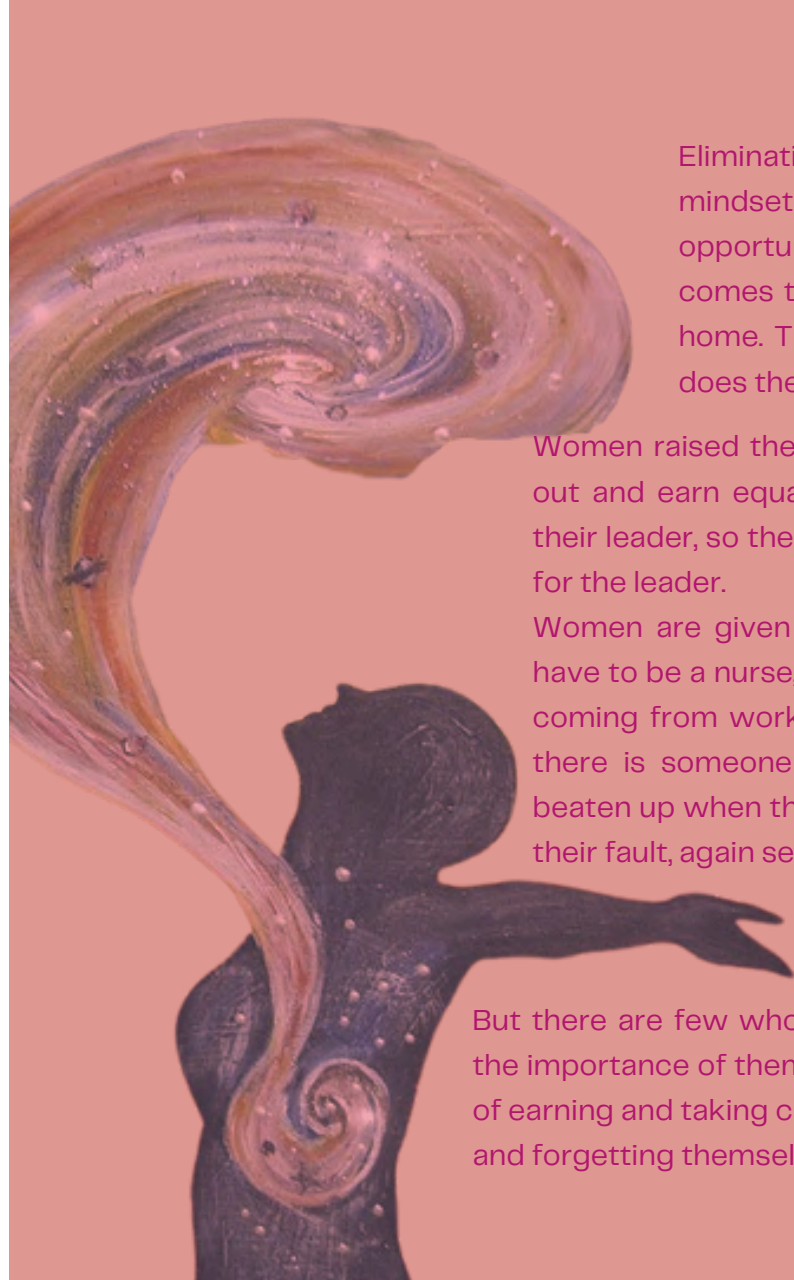
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Eliminating gender discrimination has to start with the mindset of each and every person. With awareness equal opportunity is provided in most fields but still, when it comes to looking after the kids or somebody has to stay home. The woman is expected to be the volunteer. Why does the woman have to sacrifice all the time?

Women raised their voices so they could earn and now women go out and earn equally as men. Women wanted the right to choose their leader, so they stood up for it and now women also got to vote for the leader.

Women are given equal opportunity but still there are some who have to be a nurse, maid, cook, cleaner and baby sitter at home after coming from work. They do that happily without complaining. And there is someone who has to earn, do household work and get beaten up when the man is not in a good mood. Women take that as their fault, again serve the man with no complaints. Enduring the pain

with a smiling face. Some are saved from violent relationships by their supportive relatives.

But there are few who don't stand for themselves or they don't realize the importance of themselves. Women have lost themselves in the loads of earning and taking care of their home. Giving the first priority to others and forgetting themselves who they are and what they can do.

Women are made with compassion, strength, love and care, which they go on distributing to all. Women being so generous, dedicated and faithful, they keep on hoping for change in their partner and never give up though they are tortured daily. To end discrimination and violence against women, a woman has to be strong for herself and fight within herself to get the right. It's time you balance what you give and demand the same in return. Change your mindset to "I also need love and care".

I Too Need Love

Namgay Dem, Bhutan



I am told this is... EMPOWERMENT

Sparsh Patlan, India



Confident, but never intimidating.
Ambitious, but never inconvenient.



*In the quiet embrace of tradition,
she ties her hair and her strength together*



Is it my audacity,
to still choose kindness
in a world that teaches me to shrink
before I speak?
Or is it simply that I was born into a
script
where my existence is always under
review?
I carry everything.
The violence that isn't always visible,
the anger I am told not to show,
the rules that arrive before I do.
I must be covered, but not invisible.

Confident, but never
intimidating.
Ambitious, but never
inconvenient.
I must speak,
but softly enough to not
echo.
My body is a public debate.
Too early. Too late. Too
much. Too little.
What I wear is a
conversation
strangers feel entitled to
complete.
I am told I can be anything.

But also reminded,
to cook, to clean, to care, to carry,
to hold up homes that will never carry my
name.
At work, I am equal,
until the numbers arrive.
A smaller pay slip,
a bigger expectation.

At night, I am free,
as long as I am home before fear sets in.
My safety is not a right.
It is a calculation.
Opportunity knocks,
but only if I prove I deserve the door
more than the man already inside the room.

And then there is everything else,
my caste, my class, my colour, my name
each layer another checkpoint
in a race I didn't sign up for.
Intersectionality is not a concept I studied.
It is the reason I stay awake.
The unpaid care work that fills my days
is called "nothing."
But it takes everything.
My dignity is conditional.
Signed off by fathers, husbands, families, society,
a lifetime of character certificates
for simply existing.

And still,
I am told this is empowerment.
Tell me,
why must I constantly negotiate
for space, for safety, for salary, for
self?
Why is my freedom always a
question mark
while someone else's is a full stop?
Why are there rules for me
and exceptions for the world?
Some days,
I don't want to fight systems or
break ceilings.
I just want to exist,
without explanation, without
permission, without fear.

*But maybe that is the most
radical thing of all.*



Talking About Teenage Pregnancy in Moldova

Timofti Ecaterina
Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, teenage pregnancy remains a pressing social issue, closely linked to gender inequality, limited access to education, and vulnerability among young girls. Although the adolescent birth rate has decreased over the years, it still remains higher than the European average. Each year, thousands of teenage girls become pregnant, with the majority coming from rural areas where access to information and support services is more limited.



Teenage pregnancy is not only a health concern, it is also a reflection of deeper systemic problems, including discrimination and lack of empowerment. A lot of young girls face pressure, misinformation, or even coercion, which can lead to early pregnancies and, in some cases, violence or abandonment. As a result, their education is often interrupted, limiting their future opportunities and reinforcing cycles of poverty and inequality.

Moving from awareness to action requires a strong commitment from educators, institutions, and communities. Schools play a crucial role by providing comprehensive education that promotes respect, consent, and gender equality.

Creating safe spaces where students can openly discuss sensitive topics is essential for building trust and awareness. Equally important is ensuring access to accurate information and youth-friendly health services.

Teachers and school leaders can collaborate with parents, healthcare providers, and community organizations to support adolescents and guide them toward informed decisions.

As educators, we have the responsibility not only to inform, but to empower. By fostering critical thinking, empathy, and respect, we can help young people challenge harmful norms and build a more inclusive society.



Ending discrimination and violence against women begins with education, and, with each of us, taking action where we are!

Addressing Biological Barriers in Women's Labor Market Journey

Lorna Okatch

Women's biological realities, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause, profoundly shape their labor market experiences, yet these are often dismissed as "personal" matters. Awareness alone isn't enough; we must act to dismantle the discrimination and violence embedded in these inequities.

Consider the cumulative toll: Pregnancy and maternity leave frequently lead to the "motherhood penalty," where women face wage gaps (up to 20% globally, per ILO data) and stalled promotions. Menstrual health issues cause absenteeism, met with stigma rather than support. Menopause brings fatigue and health challenges, yet workplaces lack accommodations, pushing women toward part-time roles or early exit. In Kenya, where gender-responsive budgeting is gaining traction, women comprise 70% of informal workers with minimal protections (KNBS 2023), amplifying vulnerability to economic violence.

This isn't biology's fault; it's systemic failure. Discrimination manifests as unequal pay, harassment during leave, and biased hiring. Violence escalates when economic dependence traps women in abusive cycles.

Our role? Advocate for action: Mandate paid menstrual and menopause leave, enforce paternity quotas to share caregiving, and integrate biological equity into labor laws. Policymakers, like Kenya's Parliament, must prioritize gender-disaggregated data and inclusive budgeting. Employers: Offer flexible hours and health subsidies. Individuals: Challenge biases in boardrooms and homes.

From awareness to action, ending this cycle demands collective resolve. Empower women biologically, economically, and fully, because equity isn't optional; it's urgent.

The Voice in the Beads

A story from the hills of Arusha, Tanzania

Mercy Ephrahim
Tanzania Republic

Nashipai was fourteen when they took her out of school.

Her father announced it on a Tuesday morning, the smell of acacia smoke still in the air. A man from the next enkang had offered cattle ten of them. Her bride price had been decided without a single word spoken to her.

She sat behind the mud wall of the women's house and threaded red and white beads onto a wire, just as her mother had taught her. Each bead was a silence she was expected to wear.

"In our culture," her grandmother whispered, "a quiet woman is a good woman." **But Nashipai had seen something different** – in the clinic posters, in the radio voices, in the eyes of the young teacher who had once told her: "Your mind is a gift. Do not let anyone bury it."

The night before the ceremony, she walked to the community center where a woman named Doto held a small lamp and a notebook. Doto worked with an initiative to end gender-based violence in Maasai communities around Arusha. She did not flinch when Nashipai spoke.

She listened.

That single act being truly heard cracked open something in Nashipai's chest. Within weeks, local elders were invited to dialogue. Her father, proud but shaken, sat across from community health workers and women's rights advocates. Slowly, the conversation shifted.

Nashipai returned to school the following term. She wore her beads still but now they told a different story. **A story she had chosen herself.**

The Courage to Act: Turning Awareness into Justice

By Yakusak Jennifer Ezra, Nigeria

We've spent decades bringing the shadows of discrimination and violence into the light. We've achieved awareness. Yet, awareness alone is a passive witness to suffering. To truly honor those who have been silenced, we must transition from knowing to doing. We must find the courage to act.

Ending violence against women is a human imperative. It requires us to move beyond the comfort of the spectator and into the demanding work of intervention. This courage is often forged in the quiet, difficult choices of our daily lives.

Let this not be a moment of mere reflection, but a vow of transformation. Our sisters, daughters, and mothers deserve more than our sympathy; they deserve our protection. Let our actions be the shield that ensures no woman ever has to walk in fear again.

Ending discrimination and violence against women is not an abstract goal; it is a shared obligation. Each of us has a role to play, and neutrality is no longer acceptable. From awareness, I choose action. From silence, I choose advocacy. From indifference, I choose responsibility.

What is our role?

It is found in the bravery required to challenge a "harmless" joke in a boardroom, the integrity to teach a son the true meaning of consent, and the moral clarity to never look away when a neighbor's cry echoes through a wall. It is the courage to dismantle the culture of complicity that allows discrimination to thrive and victims to carry the weight of shame.

We must shift the burden of "staying safe" from the shoulders of women to the collective conscience of society. Justice is not a gift we grant; it is a right we must actively defend.

Becoming the Change I Once Needed

Peace E. Wolloh

In many communities, discrimination against women does not always appear as open hostility. Sometimes, it is silence; the silence around menstrual health, the silence when girls are told to endure, the silence that teaches them their voices matter less. **I grew up seeing that silence, and I have chosen not to carry it forward.**

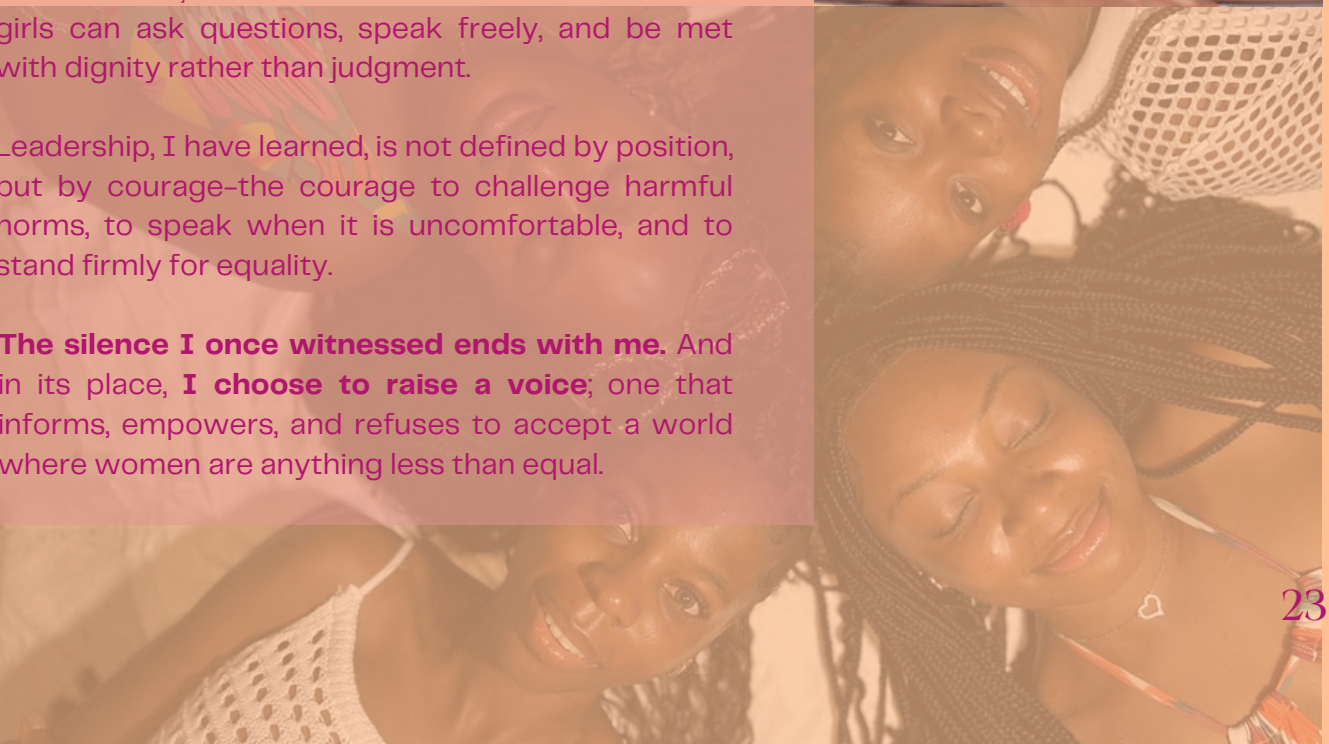
As a Biologist, I have come to understand that discrimination against women is more than a social injustice. It is a public health crisis. When girls lack access to accurate health information, when stigma surrounds their bodies, and when their concerns are dismissed, the consequences are not only emotional but deeply physical and long-lasting.

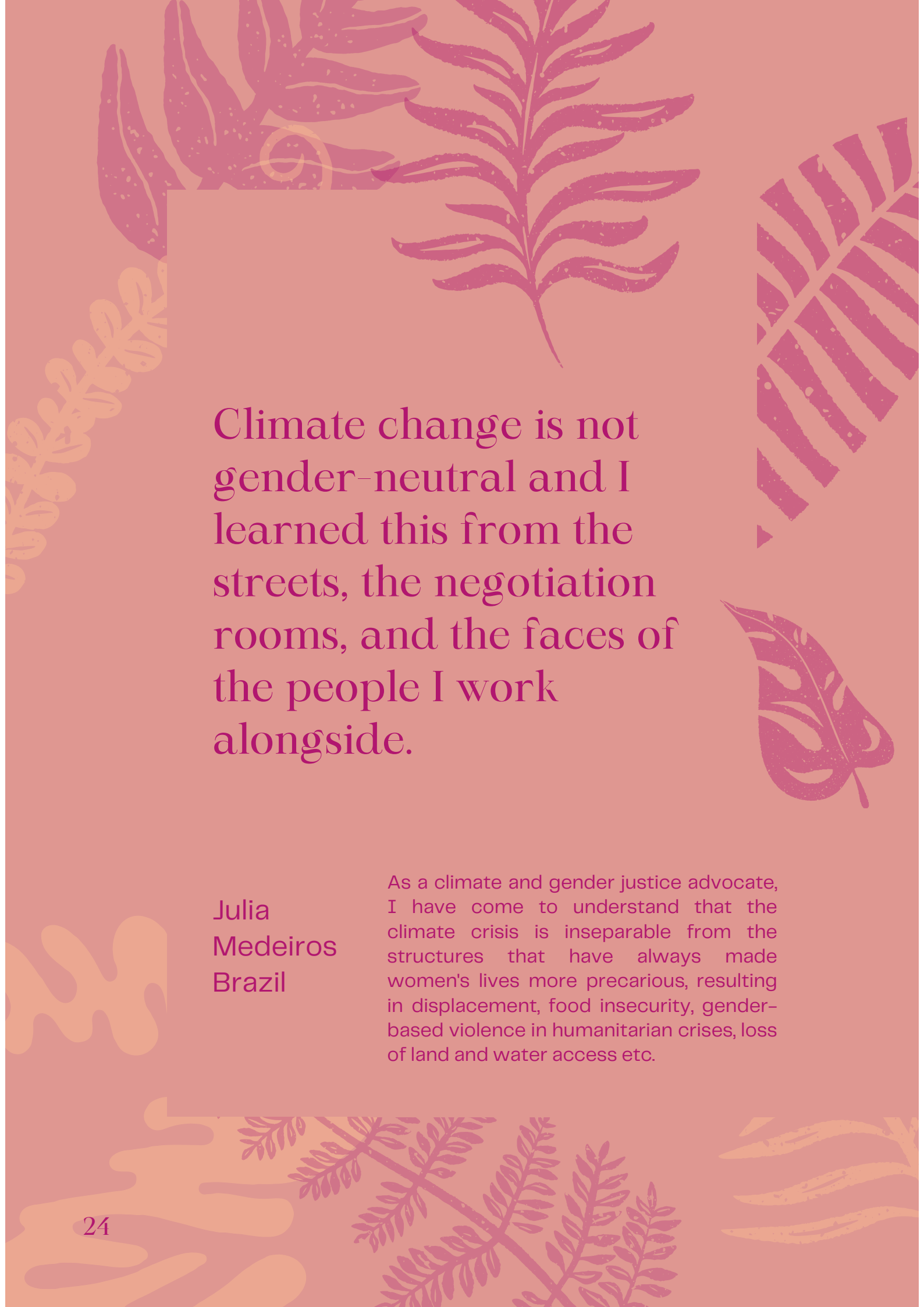
My role in eliminating discrimination begins with education. I am committed to breaking cycles of misinformation by sharing knowledge about reproductive health and empowering young women to understand their bodies without shame. But knowledge alone is not enough.

My role is also to create spaces where women are heard. Through community engagement and youth-led initiatives, I strive to foster environments where girls can ask questions, speak freely, and be met with dignity rather than judgment.

Leadership, I have learned, is not defined by position, but by courage—the courage to challenge harmful norms, to speak when it is uncomfortable, and to stand firmly for equality.

The silence I once witnessed ends with me. And in its place, **I choose to raise a voice;** one that informs, empowers, and refuses to accept a world where women are anything less than equal.





Climate change is not
gender-neutral and I
learned this from the
streets, the negotiation
rooms, and the faces of
the people I work
alongside.

Julia
Medeiros
Brazil

As a climate and gender justice advocate, I have come to understand that the climate crisis is inseparable from the structures that have always made women's lives more precarious, resulting in displacement, food insecurity, gender-based violence in humanitarian crises, loss of land and water access etc.



Working with young people at Engajamundo taught me that the most powerful climate analysis comes from those who feel the crisis most intimately. Together, we pressure politicians, propose more gender-responsive legislation, build capacity in Brazilian cities, and carry these demands into international spaces like COP and CSW.

In these rooms, bringing intersectional, territory-rooted knowledge is itself an act of resistance. This means showing up to uncomfortable institutional spaces and refusing to let adaptation policies be designed without asking: **whose bodies bear this burden?**

Climate change is perceived and lived differently according to gender, race, class, ethnicity, and territory. A woman in a flooded urban periphery does not experience a heatwave the way policy actions imagine she does, and naming this (in research, in workshops, in advocacy) is where transformation begins.

Eliminating discrimination against women means refusing to treat climate policy as technically neutral and it means understanding that gender justice and climate justice are not parallel struggles. They are the same one. And that realization changes everything about how you choose to act.





For You, For Us



Valeria Bonilla T.
Ecuador



For all the voices who were not able to speak, learn nor choose.
For every woman who has the privilege of choosing her own path and for the ones who still don't.

For every woman who was taught to remain silent and endure injustice.
For every soul who felt unconscious guiltiness for defying gendered norms.
For all the girls who internalized gender stereotypes and feel isolated.
For every woman who experienced safety, only to discover uneasiness and fear.
For the mothers, sisters and daughters who encounter the double burden of care.
For every woman who at some point in her life felt like a second-class citizen.
For that professional who feels discouraged facing a pervasive, but intangible glass-ceiling.
And for that soul who was afraid of speaking up, but stood her ground.

I encourage you to KEEP moving forward, raise your voice.

We must continue challenging barriers and advocate for women's participation in inclusive policy-making, research and education. Discrimination, power imbalance, unequal access to resources and gender stereotypes still hinder our goal of achieving a sustainable, violence-free and gender-equal society.

As the root causes of violence against women remain, women's participation at all levels of decision-making and programme implementation is essential to achieve peace and build strong institutions. Empowering women, indeed, drives economic growth, addresses poverty, and supports sustainable development, fostering long-term solutions that benefit both people and the environment.

We must not overlook our potential of becoming female leaders. We must call for positive actions of mutual encouragement and knowledge exchange, beyond differences and national borders to generate sustained social change. I advocate for women participation and ending VAW, firmly believing that **“when one woman succeeds, she helps open the door for others”**

These words are for you, for me, for us, for all women who support women, and for that woman who inspires me the most.

I state thank you





In Every Role, She Stands

Dr Neha Sharma, India

Born as a daughter—

Not always a celebration,
A quiet question in the air,
“Why not a son?” whispered in hesitation.

She learns early to lower her voice,
To fit within lines already drawn,
Her dreams trimmed gently,
Before they are even born.

As a student—

She rises with hope in her eyes,
Yet hears the murmurs,
“Don’t dream too big, be wise.”

As a professional—

She works twice as hard to be seen,
Her success questioned softly,
Her strength rarely deemed.

As a wife—

She carries love with silent grace,
Yet expectations weigh heavy,
She must adjust, she must embrace.

As a mother—

She gives all, without a pause,
Yet guilt follows her footsteps,
For every unseen flaw.

In every role she plays,
She is judged, she is tried,
Balancing worlds within her,
With tears she often hides.

But still she rises—

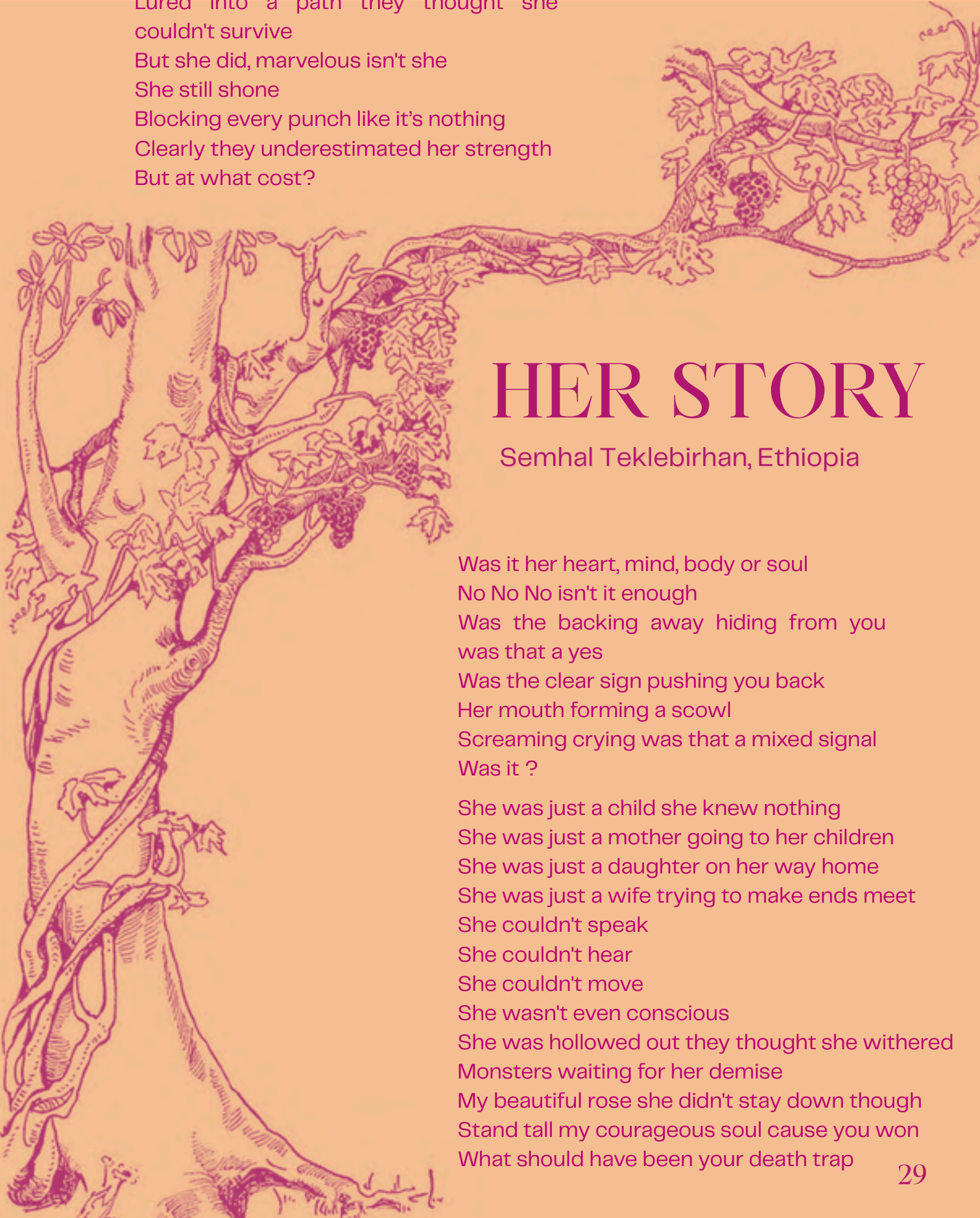
Not broken, but bold,
Carrying stories untold,
Of courage stronger than gold.

She is not asking for sympathy,
Nor a place of pity’s art,
She is asking for equality,
For dignity, for a start.

Let us change the voices around her,

Let respect replace the blame,
For when a woman stands empowered,
The world will never be the same.

Colorless night
Drained by everyone around her
Dismissed her truth
Meaningless words selfish desires
Crossed boundaries
Lured into a path they thought she
couldn't survive
But she did, marvelous isn't she
She still shone
Blocking every punch like it's nothing
Clearly they underestimated her strength
But at what cost?



HER STORY

Semhal Teklebirhan, Ethiopia

Was it her heart, mind, body or soul
No No No isn't it enough
Was the backing away hiding from you
was that a yes
Was the clear sign pushing you back
Her mouth forming a scowl
Screaming crying was that a mixed signal
Was it ?

She was just a child she knew nothing
She was just a mother going to her children
She was just a daughter on her way home
She was just a wife trying to make ends meet
She couldn't speak
She couldn't hear
She couldn't move
She wasn't even conscious
She was hollowed out they thought she withered
Monsters waiting for her demise
My beautiful rose she didn't stay down though
Stand tall my courageous soul cause you won
What should have been your death trap

Protection and Policy: Due Diligence in Protecting Girls and Women in Bhutan

Tenzin Pemo, Bhutan

Respected Esteemed Members of Parliament,

I am a history teacher and an enthusiast of civic and citizenship education in the school and in the community. Lately, I have initiated an activity in the class where students report on local, national, and international current affairs. Over time, it has given us a reality check on the state and safety of people in the country. We found it disturbing that girls and women are affected disproportionately by violence.

We understand that the statistics may not show huge numbers of survivors, but the headlines and news reports we read are deeply disturbing because of the brutality and harm caused by the perpetrators. We are of the view that many cases go unreported, especially domestic violence and gender-based violence. In a recent case reported by The Bhutanese (Instagram) on 20th April, a family sought justice after a victim was left paralyzed in a domestic violence case. The Court Family Bench sentenced the perpetrator, to 2 years, 11 months, and 29 days in prison after finding him guilty of domestic violence resulting in grievous injury to his 23-year-old girlfriend. According to the court's verdict, he may opt to pay Nu 131,500 instead of serving the custodial sentence. The offence carries a sentencing range of one to three years' imprisonment.

This case left us divided, confused, and questioning. Is her remaining life worth just a few hundred thousand? Is this the optimal protection one can receive? Is violence payable? Will such trends deter similar cases? Are women protected enough from violence? Are domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) fully understood?

Bhutan, known for its happiness and optimistic mindset, guided by our Monarchs and supported by responsible stakeholders, including the Parliament and judiciary, has ensured a fair, just, and harmonious society. I believe that the unwavering maintenance of universal franchise and the legally recognized age of consent have contributed significantly to keeping girls and women safe from sexual exploitation.

However, it is our aspiration that the esteemed parliamentarians exercise due diligence in revisiting and readdressing the empowerment of survivors and strengthening law and order for perpetrators. With timely intervention and small steps, we can ensure that people are not only protected and safe but also prevent such issues from growing into a larger national concern.



From Awareness to Action

Fatou Jallow, Gambia

In The Gambia, the morning begins with
quiet strength
heels on dust roads, files under arm,
a teacher, a nurse, a civil servant,
women carrying more than titles carrying
change.

Discrimination and gender roles,
a shadow on our rising dreams,
our goals slowed to a quiet crawl,
our achievements caught between seams.

They say a woman's place is small,
a domestic wave upon the shore,
to rise, to lead, to dare, to call
they claim she should not ask for more.

But we are more than silent tides,
more than hands that serve and stay,
within us strength and fire resides,
to shape our paths, to lead the way.

Let old beliefs by men begin to fall,
let narrow visions fade and bend,
for when one woman stands up tall,
a thousand others rise again.

Let language of awareness be heard
statistics whispered in meetings,
stories folded into silence,
truths too heavy for polite rooms.

But awareness is only the first light.
Action is the rising sun



It is speaking when silence is safer,
questioning norms that bind women to limits,
refusing to shrink in boardrooms
where decisions shape our futures.

It is rewriting roles
where a woman leads, decides, builds,
not in spite of tradition,
but transforming it.

It is standing with the colleague
whose voice trembles but does not break,
challenging jokes that wound,
policies that exclude,
systems that overlook.

Violence is not always loud
sometimes it is denial, neglect,
a door closed before it opens.

And so, we open it.

As Gambian career women,
we rise not alone but together
lifting, mentoring, protecting,
turning awareness into daily acts of courage.

Because change is not a moment
it is a practice.

And in every office, classroom, and community,
we choose to act.



Your Role in Ending Discrimination & Violence Against Women

Maria Agustina Alfaro, Argentina

We must not take for granted
that life is lived in fear.
That I cannot walk home alone,
that the night is dangerous,
that “these are not hours for women.”
That we move through the world afraid something
might happen,
that we send a message saying “I got home,”
or stay awake until our friend tells us she arrived
safely.

We must not accept
that how we dress, speak, or behave
is questioned in us, but not in them.
That we are expected to be quiet, composed,
to apologize, even when we have done nothing
wrong.

None of this should be the norm.

None of this is inevitable.

None of this is something we should resign
ourselves to.

Violence does not begin with a blow;
it begins with what we normalize every day.
That is why change is not distant, but starts in the
everyday:

in what we say, in what we allow,
in what we refuse to stay silent about.

It starts with us:

in our homes, our friendships,
our communities.

By demanding the respect we deserve.

By challenging what is wrong.

By speaking out against what harms us.

If we want a different future,
where women can live without fear,
we cannot wait.

We have to start today.

She End up with the bullet in the middle of night.

Sana Ghafoor, Pakistan

Once a soul who can't decide
Which body it would take
So the girl body she decides
The most humble one, the loving one
Who sprout like a rose but ends up in
thorns

Once she dreamed of becoming a
role ,but she ends up in taking
household

Once she dreamed of being loved the
most but ends up with child,

The love she never got have to divide
Once she dreamed of her own home
echoing with her voice,

But she ends up with the paper of
divorce

Once she dreamed of becoming a
hope with her voice,

She ends up with the bullet in the
middle of night

Her name eventually dies as she
never alive ,

Once their was a girl who dreamed of
life.





Widows' lives in Burkina Faso

Mariam SAWADOGO, Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, losing one's husband is seen as a curse. Widows are confronted with extreme poverty, exclusion, vulnerability and the loss of goods (mainly land) thanks to tradition. Widows face many problems such as :

- Levirate : the tradition requires a brother or relative of the husband to marry the widow without the consent of this one. There is no marital test so the widow can catch diseases like AIDS, hepatitis.
- Plunder : after the husband's death , many families monopolize all the materials and houses and leave the widow and the orphans in extreme poverty and pain.
- Discrimination : many widows are rejected because nobody wants care for them. Some are accused of being witches or being responsible for their husbands' death.

Taking action

For a successful struggle, educators, associations and institutions must be engaged. We as teachers , we can raise students ' awareness on the effects of discrimination towards widows which affects children as well as women and the entire society. Teachers can set activities such as role plays , project-based learning, presentations to shock students so that they can understand to which extent widows' exclusion impacts negatively. Associations and institutions can provide economic empowerment through humanitarian aid , credits ... to combat social exclusion and trauma widows experience.

I will not stand still
while quiet wounds are hidden
beneath polite smiles and lowered eyes.
I will speak—
not louder than others,
but clearer than fear.
In rooms where jokes cut like knives,
I will not laugh to belong.
I will name the harm,
even if my voice trembles.
I will listen—
to stories long ignored,
to truths carried in silence,
to strength that never asked for praise.
I will teach the young
that respect is not a favor,
but a right—
that equality is not an idea,
but a duty lived each day.
In my work,
I will open doors wider,
not for applause,
but so no one must ask permission
to walk through.
I will challenge the old ways
that chain worth to gender,
and I will choose fairness
even when it is inconvenient.
Because change is not distant—
it begins in small refusals,
in steady courage,
in the quiet decision
to do better than before.
This is my role:
to stand, to act, to persist—
until no woman must prove
she deserves what was always hers.

My Part in Breaking the Silence

Nelia E. Grafe, Philippines



Sacred Mothers, Disposable Women

Semanur Yeşiltepe,
Türkiye

I had been searching for a job for a long time, and the fact that my interview happened to fall on Mother's Day filled me with mixed emotions. The man conducting the interview was complaining about his female employees: "They get pregnant, they get married, they leave us halfway through..." He spoke at length about how victimized they were because of this. At the same time, he subtly tried to find out whether I had plans for marriage or

children in the near future. Even though I personally do not have such plans right now, I defended the women he spoke about and said that what they wanted was their most natural right. To say the least, he did not like that.

So decide which one it is: Are you worried about declining birth rates and women not getting married, or are you worried about women who do want to marry and have children? Or perhaps both?

In Türkiye, maternity leave is currently on the parliamentary agenda. According to the proposal, maternity leave for mothers will increase from 16 weeks to 24 weeks, while fathers' leave will increase from 5 days to 10 days. Although this is presented as a policy in favor of women, it risks deepening inequality even further.

When childcare is placed overwhelmingly on women, it pushes them out of working life, interrupts their careers, and causes them to lose financial independence. This creates not only individual but also structural inequality. When care labor is placed on a single

parent, it brings chronic exhaustion, postpartum depression, burnout, and immense psychological pressure. The opportunity to rest, have personal time, and participate in social life decreases drastically. This inequality is also passed down from generation to generation. When children grow up in environments where caregiving is assigned to only one parent, they never truly experience equal responsibility-sharing. As a result, unequal gender roles become internalized from an early age.

What strikes me most is how little men and fathers seem willing to fight for change in this area. Because it benefits them, their careers are never interrupted in the same way. They only see the “cute” side of parenthood: a sweet baby, a few sleepless nights, a couple of dirty diapers, and then back to normal life. Meanwhile, on top of all the physical and mental burdens placed on women, society adds the glorification of “sacred motherhood.” Women are expected to become superhuman — tireless, endlessly capable, able to overcome the impossible.

Is motherhood sacred, together with all the unequal realities women are forced to endure, or is it only sacred as long as it fits within your rules?

So, anyway, I don't think I got the job.



It is My STORY!

Agbalessi Aurielle, Benin

I was nineteen, stitched with innocence, where trust still wore a friendly face and danger had no name.

He was twenty-six, old enough to know, old enough to understand what consent means.

I arrived with open hands, carrying nothing but kindness and naivety.

But inside that room, the air changed its language.

My no became thunder, my cries became broken wings, my tears became rivers, and still he stood like stone.

He stole the sky from my chest, the calm in my breathing, the softness of believing.

He carved a wound in time and left me there to bleed in silence.

So I buried the truth beneath my smile, beneath my family's questions, beneath the fear of blame, beneath nights that knew my shaking.

For years, that memory walked behind me like fire without light.

But I am not the ruin he imagined. I am not the silence he wanted. I am the voice that survived him.

I am the woman who names the darkness and still chooses dawn.

This is not only a poem. It is my scar that learned to sing. It is my story.

And with every breath I own, I say no to violence.

To every woman who has suffered in silence — you are still standing.

What was taken from you does not define who you are. You remain whole, dignified, and capable of rising again.

Ma voix n'est pas faible , elle dérange la violence

Ma voix n'est pas faible , elle dérange la violence.



Personal Experience in Combating Discrimination and Violence Against Women

Amina, Nigeria

Forced marriage remains a serious social problem among the Hausa-Fulani communities in Nigeria and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. The practice is linked to the cultural tradition known as “Bayar wa ko Kamu” (child betrothal), in which parents promise their children in marriage at birth without their consent. Often, the intended spouses are relatives or children of close family friends in order to maintain family ties and social relationships.

From childhood to adolescence, gifts known as “Toshi,” such as clothing, sweets, and money, are exchanged between families to symbolize acceptance of the arrangement. This practice is further reinforced by cultural and religious expectations that children must remain submissive and obedient to parental authority. As a result, refusal is frequently viewed as disrespectful or unacceptable.

As a victim of forced marriage, I was denied the right to choose whom I wished to marry. My refusal led to emotional and social hardships, including expulsion from my family home, verbal abuse, physical violence, and neglect. I was left to support both myself and my education, experiences that caused significant emotional distress and depression.

Despite these challenges, resilience and determination enabled me to obtain three degrees in Criminology, Sociology, and International Affairs from reputable universities in Nigeria. These experiences inspired my commitment to addressing systemic structures that perpetuate violence and discrimination against women.

In 2025, I organized a community campaign against forced marriage targeting 150 adolescent girls in rural communities. I also joined international organizations and advocacy programs to contribute to global efforts aimed at protecting women and girls from abuse, discrimination, and violence.



WORD-HER-PUZZLE

STRENGTH

EQUALITY

LEAD

ECHOES

VAW

VOICE

SURVIVOR

HER

RESILIENT

ACTION

WOMEN

JUSTICE

Find and cross all the listed tracks of our stories.

The words may go horizontally, vertically, diagonally, not backwards.

A	S	T	R	E	N	W	C	T	I	D	C
C	V	O	I	C	E	A	N	L	H	S	A
T	M	W	S	G	G	E	P	A	E	T	N
I	J	H	T	U	I	A	U	C	T	R	D
O	A	E	U	L	O	I	M	T	R	E	D
N	C	R	I	N	S	V	P	I	V	N	L
I	L	S	E	C	H	O	E	S	A	G	A
A	E	Q	U	A	L	I	T	Y	W	T	K
R	A	C	V	U	D	A	N	I	S	H	E
T	D	R	A	M	I	U	W	O	M	E	N
B	R	S	U	R	V	I	V	O	R	A	U
F	S	U	E	W	J	U	S	T	I	C	E



GENDER
EQUALITY

WOMEN
LIFT UP
WOMEN

SHE
LEADS

WE WON'T BE
SILENCED

WE
BEYOND
THE HYPE

POWER
TO US

WOMEN
MEAN TO
FIGHT

SUPPORT
WOMEN
RIGHTS

SHE
LEADS

USE
YOUR
VOICE

SHE
LEADS

THE FUTURE
IS
FEMALE

Echos
of Her

WOMEN RIGHTS
ARE
HUMAN RIGHTS

GENDER
EQUALITY

CULTURE
NOT
COMPLACENCY

ABOUT
ART
NOT WORTH

SISTERHOOD

STAND UP
FOR YOUR
RIGHTS!

YOUR
VOICE
SHAPES
OUR
FUTURE

MY BODY
MY CHOICE
MY RULES

HER STORY
MATTERS

WOMEN
SUPPORT
WOMEN

REPRESENT
ALL OF US

MORE
THAN A
TREND

SPEAK
UP

EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES

BREAK
THE GLASS
CEILING

LOVE WHAT
WE MAKE

CHANGE
is in HER
HANDS



GCED
ONLINE CAMPUS