Concept Note

Rural women are at the center of social and economic life in their communities. Yet these remote communities often face unique challenges to development. Women and girls in rural areas often have less access to medical care and other services than those in urban areas. Remote areas may also face distinct challenges in achieving female education and empowerment. Targeted health and education interventions offer an opportunity to empower women and girls in rural areas and help attain gender equality.

The health needs of women and girls in rural areas often go underserved. Many women do not realize that the symptoms they experience may indicate hormonal imbalances. Harmful stigma about normal biological processes such as menstruation can make it harder for them to get the help they deserve. And even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms. Poor health hurts gender equality by undermining women and girls’ ability to realize their potential and drive development in their communities.

Fertility Education & Medical Management (FEMM) offers a comprehensive, integrated women’s health program based on informed consent and expanding literacy. Understanding one’s own body is essential for good health and empowers women and girls to be informed participants in their care. FEMM provides women and girls with health education and fights stigma about menstruation. It also trains doctors in the use of medical protocols that facilitate differential diagnoses and tailored treatments. FEMM empowers women to make informed choices in family planning and does so in a way that is low-cost, culturally sensitive, and encourages collaboration between partners.

Promoting female education provides one of the best ways of combating systems and practices that limit women and girls’ ability to participate fully in society. Education can also help empower women and girls and achieve gender equality through teaching children about the value of every human being. The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it, and should therefore be respected. The program is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement.

Children who understand human dignity are not only prepared to make responsible personal decisions, but to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships. The HDC’s focus on dignity promotes equality between boys and girls and supports anti-bullying efforts. It also gives girls a sense of self-worth, that regardless of their sex, background, or location, they have value and the ability to be excellent.

This event will feature remarks from the program developers as well as those implementing these programs in rural areas, including those who have worked with migrants and have suffered armed conflict. They will provide insights from their experience and discuss ways in which these programs can help achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and how to implement FEMM and HDC in more communities around the world.

Speakers

Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
Anna Halpine, Chief Executive Officer, FEMM Foundation
Kekuut Hoomkwap, Chief Technology Officer, FEMM Foundation
Dr. Don Bouchard, Holy Family Health Services, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Dr. Martina Nkechi, Doctors Health Initiative, Lagos, Nigeria
Dr. Zakia Jahan, MPH Candidate, Founder & Director of the Center for Human Development, USA/Bangladesh