



Elizabeth Bolarinwa

In her own words, GenNext Fellow, Elizabeth Bolarinwa, recounts her remarkable experience accompanying her host organization, Save the Children, to Cape Town, South Africa to attend the 2024 Sexual Violence Research Institute Forum.

In October, I experienced a second international fellowship trip to Cape Town, South Africa, for my first international conference, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Forum 2024.

For a week, we participated in plenary discussions, group sessions, and presentations exploring interventions, risks, challenges, and breakthroughs regarding sexual and gender-based violence. SVRI convenes every two years and brings together a diverse group of stakeholders to information-share, set priorities, and



Elizabeth and co-presenters Nancy and Lincie pose with their research poster

brainstorm means of ending Violence Against Women (VAW), Children (VAC), and other forms of violence. Save the Children had an amazing presence at the Forum! We had a robust delegation with members from different regions, countries, and teams.

Members from our delegation included session moderators, session presenters, and poster presenters of extremely impactful work. One of our colleagues, Masturah Baba, even won a prize for her presentation! As a part of our engagement at the conference, we hosted a booth with resources, merchandise, and a friendship-making bracelet station. My fellow GenNext

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colleague, Kamila Montesinos, played a large role in organizing our delegation booth alongside her advisor, Yeva Avakyan, and Global Research & Evidence Advisor, Lauren Stephens.

I was able to do my part by designing the booth banner, inspired by a flower garden and stickers, modeled after the beautiful King Protea, native to South Africa and the country's national flower. People who stopped by used Post-its on the banner to 'plant the seeds' each thought we needed to end VAW and VAC by writing affirmations, stigmas to end, and messages of hope, many wrote in their native tongue.

These Post-it seeds created a beautiful reflection of the hopes of the conference and its diversity. I attended many interesting sessions and workshops. Some focused on research and tools, and others focused on interventions, program design, funding challenges, and less-discussed forms of sexual violence.

Rapid and poster presentations exhibited research and learnings from around the world aimed at targeting, preventing, and combatting gender-based violence (GBV). I explored a range of topics, including the intersections of climate change and violence, technology-facilitated VAW and VAC, and the role of cash

interventions in reducing poverty and violence. Particularly impactful were discussions on how programs are scaling up and partnering with governments to achieve sustainable community-level change.



Image of Bo-Kaap, originally rental homes for South African Muslim (Cape Malays) slaves, now colorfully adorned in expression of freedom and culture.

I was able to present a poster titled “*Research for Change: Assessing Responses to the Needs of Survivors of Sexual Violence in Humanitarian Settings, Findings from Aden, Lahj, Yemen*”, alongside my teammate Nancy Ibrahim and KIT University social scientist, Lincie Kusters.

Lincie and my advisor, Sarah Ashraf, lead this project from 2019 to 2022, aiming to explore the effect of sexual violence on different populations in Yemen and providing evidence-informed recommendations to increase humanitarian actors’ capacity to identify and respond to sexual violence survivors’ needs and uphold their rights to health, including mental health and psychosocial support.

Working on this research and contributing to health interventions for GBV has been an amazing learning opportunity. I look forward to applying what I learned from the conference to my work and career in the future. Outside the conference walls, I visited Bo-Kaap, the Cape of Good Hope, and the lively Waterfront, enjoying the rich history, diverse cuisines, and dynamic music scene.



Save the Children delegation presents their conference booth design

The blend of learning, networking, and cultural exploration made this trip a truly unforgettable experience. Attending the SVRI Forum was an amazing career milestone and I am eager to integrate these learnings into my work and look forward to contributing to future forums.

