

Soroptimist
International



Soroptimist  International

Educate to Lead

a global voice
for women



2010 Global Impact Report:

FOCUS ON ADVOCACY

The essence of the Soroptimist model is simple: educate women and girls today to create the female leaders of tomorrow. SI knows how important it is for women and girls to be afforded the opportunity to lead and participate in decision making (read on to learn about why!) – at local, national, and international levels. We also know that, in order to get to that place, we need to educate, empower, and

enable – *our E³ model*. We *educate*

women and girls by increasing their access to the skills necessary to take on whatever challenge they desire – from basic literacy and numeracy skills to vocational training to health or sanitation to climate change to preparation for running in elections and everything in between. Improving physical environments, such as gender appropriate sanitation facilities or building dormitories, also increases access to skills and thus also falls within this framework.

In doing so, SI *empowers* women with confidence and choice, giving them the tools necessary to achieve their fullest potential. These two ‘E’s are primarily under our ACTION strategy. Thirdly, we go beyond the individual woman or girl and work within the wider community to *enable opportunities* for women and girls to use their skills and confidence as leaders and role models. We achieve this under our ADVOCACY and AWARENESS RAISING strategies. SI educates individual women and girls with skills, empowers them with confidence, and enables opportunities in the wider community. Put it all together and we have a positive collective global impact which transforms the lives and status of women and girls worldwide, opening doors for women and girls to become leaders in many different ways.

The Soroptimist Model

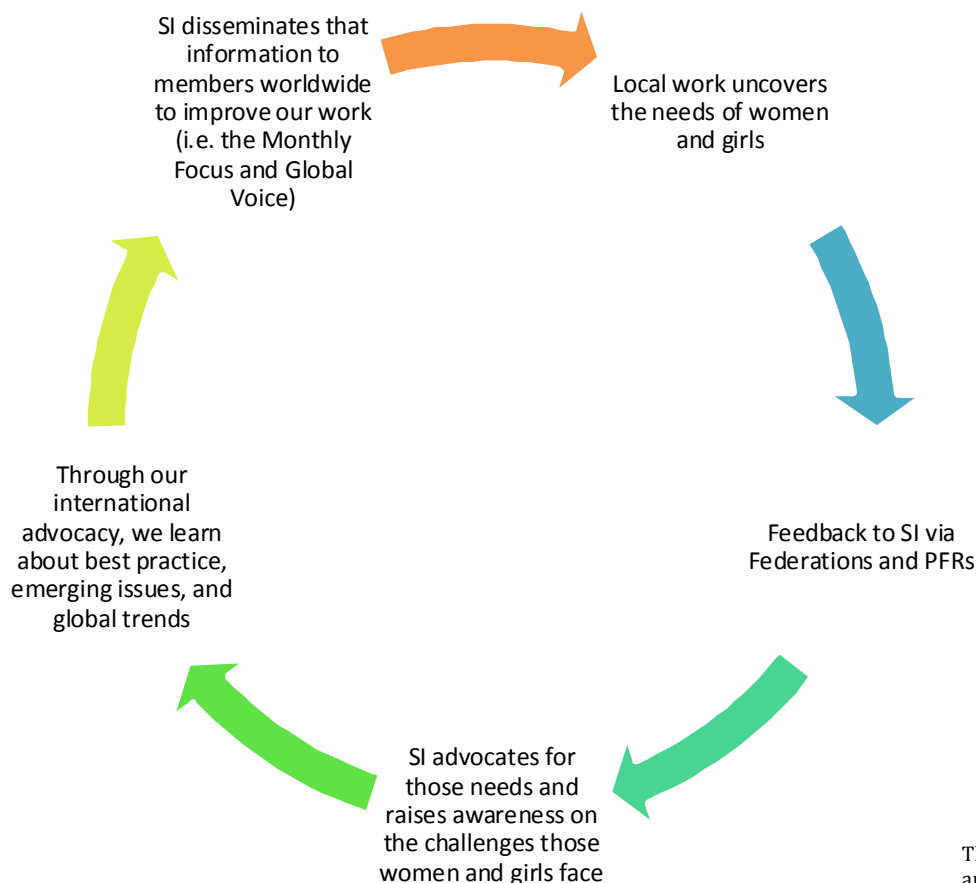


Educate to Lead

Soroptimist International is also deeply grounded in connecting the local actions undertaken by clubs and members to our global advocacy and awareness raising work. There is a constant feedback loop between the two – first and foremost, our advocacy and awareness raising work is driven by the voices of the women and girls whom we serve at local level. Being an advocate is a responsibility, and for SI to truly be a global voice for women and girls, we must listen to the needs and solutions which come from those whom we serve. On the other side of the feedback loop, actions taken at local and national levels are

informed by our advocacy and awareness raising work – we learn from our international partners and from global policy settings forums and act as a conduit to disseminate that information to members around the world to inform their work. This could be new and emerging trends, successful best practices, issues and challenges that we may not have known about before, and, most importantly – solutions. This constant exchange of information makes our work in action, advocacy, and awareness-raising responsible and responsive. And it’s fun!

Connecting local to global



The Monthly Focus and Global Voice are communications tools available on our website, www.soroptimistinternational.org

A global voice for women and girls

In this section, we report on the impact we have had globally through our advocacy and awareness raising work, particularly through our network of representatives at the six major UN centres and with our international partners.

- SI submitted **two written statements on education and leadership** to high level, international conferences at the UN – the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women ('CSW') and the 2011 Economic and Social Council's ('ECOSOC') High Level Segment. Government officials from all UN member states, involved in decision-making and policy setting, read these statements. SI's statements also influenced the outcome documents from these conferences which go on to form the basis of international policies and guidance for governments. You can read these statements at the end of this chapter.

- SI developed an **advocacy pack for Soroptimists around the world** to take part in pre-CSW work in their home countries, including a directory of national gender advisors (government), a postcard to send to them, a template letter to send to officials, and a copy of the SI

CSW statement to use in club meetings.

- SI, in partnership with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts ('WAGGGS') and the World Young Women's Christian Association ('YWCA'), was selected to deliver an **oral statement** to the plenary at this year's CSW on the relationship between violence against girls and young women and barriers in access to education – 192 heads of state heard our voice, representing all of the women and girls with whom we work at local level.
- At CSW 55, SI spearheaded two **workshops on access to education**. One, in partnership with WAGGGS, explored the importance of education across a woman's life course, including an intergenerational dialogue between Soroptimists and Girl Guides. The second, in partnership with UN Women, WAGGGS, and the YWCA, illustrated the importance of creating safe spaces for young women and girls to increase access to education. It is estimated that approximately **200+ attendees** learned about our mission and our work.
- SI, WAGGGS, and YWCA released a **powerful joint statement** on the importance of creating safe spaces for young women and girls to increase access to education. All three organisations

"We are taking action today to put an end to violence, one of the issues that most affects us as girls and young women. We know that together we can make the world a safer place for everyone. As girls and young women, you may call us the leaders of tomorrow, but we are also the leaders of today." (Nefeli, Girl Guide, Greece)



SI and WAGGGS
at CSW 55

"Women are like tea bags. You don't know how strong they are until you drop them in hot water" (Mrs Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago)



SI's panel at the Commonwealth Women as Agents of Change event

- SI was honoured to be asked to **host a panel discussion** at the Commonwealth Women as Agents of Change event at the House of Commons in London. The keynote speaker was Mrs Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Commonwealth Chairperson-in-office and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who spoke about the amazing strides women could take if they were afforded opportunities to education and leadership. The SI panellists were Reilly Dempsey, SI Programme Director, Ann Cotton, Executive Director and founder of CAMFED, Alison Sutherland, Project Sierra Liaison and Technical Advisor on Governance for Sierra Leone, Commonwealth Secretariat, and Rebecca Munro, Communications and Advocacy Director for the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS). The panel was entitled

“Working Locally to Impact Globally - The Practicalities of Education in the Community”, illustrating how simple solutions to local issues can collectively have a much wider impact. Many **high ranking government officials** from Commonwealth countries were present, as well as representatives from a select group of NGOs and other stakeholders.

- SI was invited to participate in an event organised by the **Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women** - in cooperation with UNIS – to commemorate 100 Years of International Women’s Day. President Elect Alice Wells gave a presentation on the importance of education and the linkages between violence against women and girls and education.

Women as Agents of Change!

As part of the events to celebrate the theme of ‘women as agents of change’, the Commonwealth launched a competition to find the Commonwealth’s most inspiring women. SI was invited to nominate three agents of change. SI reached out to all four federations (as all Federations have Commonwealth countries) and invited applications. The countries eligible were: Canada (SIA), Cyprus, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda (SIE), Antigua, Barbados, Cameroon, The Gambia, Grenada, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, Pakistan, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, UK (SIGBI), Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore and the Solomon Islands (SISWP).

We received 13 excellent applications from nine countries! A team worked together to select our three nominees:

- Rose Simbo (Sierra Leone/UK)
- Matilda Mathias (India)
- Dame Carol Kidu (Papua New Guinea/Australia)

To celebrate and share the fantastic examples of leadership of all the Soroptimist applicants, SI ran a special series of blog postings sharing each story (28th March – 1st April). You can read all of their stories here:

<http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/blog>, in our ‘Women as Agents of Change’ series. The Commonwealth's most inspiring agents of change will be featured in a special publication to be presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in October 2011 in Perth, Australia.

Activity connected to education and leadership has been ongoing at all the UN Centres throughout 2010 and 2011. It is important to appreciate that education and leadership is a crosscutting theme which touches on many areas of UN work. However, there are some areas of UN work where this theme is particularly prominent. Here is a brief summary of some of the main events from the past 18 months.

- UNESCO Education for All Monitoring Report (ongoing), Paris: As seen later in this report, Education For All is a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015 (in line with the MDGs). UNESCO has been mandated to coordinate the international efforts to reach Education for All. The initiative, based in Paris, is supported by SI through our team of UNESCO representatives. They regularly attend updates and reviews of the EFA initiative which take place every 4-6 months.

Involvement in EFA at UNESCO

represents a great opportunity for learning whilst Soroptimists on the ground contribute to the EFA goal through their grassroots work.

- International Summit: The Courage to lead, December 2009, Geneva: This summit focussed on the **advancement of women through leadership**. Representatives from major NGOs, governmental and UN agencies were invited to participate in panel discussions in issue-specific breakout sessions to discuss the challenges women face in accessing education and political literacy. SI was able to **share our perspective** and establish common ground with the other agencies present.

- World Programme for Human Rights Education and Training, June 2010-May 2011, Geneva: On 10 December 2004, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education to advance the implementation of human rights education programmes in all sectors, to provide a framework for action and to strengthen partnerships and cooperation from the international level down to the grass roots.

The first phase, which focused on implementing human rights education within primary and secondary schools, came to an end in 2009. The second phase (2010-2014) focuses on human rights education for higher education and on human rights training programmes for teachers and educators, civil servants and law enforcement officials. The second phase is particularly important in reaching women and girls outside of the formal education system, ensuring that they enjoy equity and equality in education and leadership opportunities. **SI has been involved in the planning of this phase** since June 2010. **SI is a member of the NGO Working Group** for Human Rights Education. The working group is a networking, lobbying, and consultative group working on the right to education within the broader context of human rights education. The focus is on

minority and at risk groups which includes women and children.

SI has **contributed to consultations** on the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training and contributed to the drawing up of an NGO response delivered at the 15th Session of the Human Rights Council. SI contributed and supported a second statement at the 16th Session of the Human Rights Council in March 2011, supported by 39 NGOs.

- Events at the Food and Agricultural Organisation, Rome: The **role of rural women** has been inching up the agenda over the past 12 months. Rural women will be the focus of the summer 2011 meeting of the FAO, and it will also be the main theme of CSW 56. SI, along with a number of NGOs, are encouraging the FAO to develop policies which include gender appropriate and sector specific training opportunities to equip rural women to make a difference.
- SI has taken part in various events which have increased the standing of SI at the FAO whilst pushing the education and leadership theme in the context of rural women forwards. In October, our UN Representative held meetings with senior officials to **discuss SI's position on gender empowerment**, and in March, **delivered a statement**



Soroptimists prepare for advocacy work at CSW55

- UNEP, February 2011, Nairobi: SI delivered a joint NGO statement during the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF) at the United Nations Environmental Programme in Nairobi on the importance of getting more women into positions of leadership within **environmental policy and decision making.**
- Youth Forum, February 2011, Paris: In partnership with the Division of Human Rights of UNESCO, NGOs organised an afternoon of awareness on Women, Africa and Human Development. This event was for young people aged 15-25 years. **Over 300 young people attended** to learn about this issue and to gain some UN experience, plus skills in debating and public speaking. SI was able to showcase club projects from several countries. The main topics were education and human development with a presentation by SI UN Representatives on work the French Union is doing in Senegal and income generating skills with a presentation by SI UN Representatives.

"Women need to be involved in key positions...such as finance, education and health, with reasonable budgetary allocations. Examples can be taken of Norway, with 40 percent of women representation in Parliament, and from Rwanda (which can be regarded as a best practice country), with 50 percent representation of women in Parliament."

(SI Statement to UNEP)

which **SI is a member**, was invited to an informal dialogue with the Executive Director of UNODC, an informal dialogue with the chairwoman of the Plenary,



Soroptimists and WAGGGS at DPI 2010

- Commission on Narcotic Drugs, April 2011, Vienna: The importance of awareness raising to stem the demand for illicit drugs was emphasised, alongside the crucial role NGOs must play in achieving this at community level. Education programmes, in formal and non-formal settings, are very important in the dissemination of this information. The Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs, of

and an informal dialogue with the International Narcotics Control Board President. The dialogue with INCB President was very interesting stressing the importance of civil society in the fight against the international drugs trade. During the informal discussion with the chairwoman of the Plenary SI were able to push for a stronger focus on gender issues.

A school in India has 700 students and no running water. Without access to proper toilets and sanitation, many of the girls are forced to drop out.

In New Zealand, adolescent girls attend schools every day where bullying destroys their self-esteem, confidence, and ability to learn. In some cases, girls turn to self-harm, including cutting and substance misuse.

In Cameroon, high dropout rates leave generations of women without opportunity – with no basic literacy, maths, or vocational skills, they are at high risk of extreme poverty. Sex work, unwanted pregnancies, homelessness, and isolation are daily realities.

Pinning the world's hopes for the future of women and girls on increasing enrolment rates obscures the thousands upon thousands of stories like these. An equal opportunity to learn in a safe space, free from violence, exploitation, and discrimination is no less a human right than the right to have one's name on an enrolment roster. Despite increases in enrolment rates in recent years and progress towards MDG 3, we live in a world where millions of women lack basic skills in reading, writing, and numeracy, in both the Global North and the Global South. Quality and breadth of education must be as much a priority as enrolment. Violence against women and girls, gender stereotypes, patriarchal systems, and

This written statement was submitted for the 2011 ECOSOC High Level Segment, taking place in July in Geneva. The theme for this year's meeting is "Implementing the Internationally Agreed Goals and Commitments in regard to Education". High level officials from ministries for Gender, Development Cooperation, Finance, Health and Foreign Affairs, Executive Heads and senior officials of UN Funds, Agencies and Programmes, and representatives from civil society, private sector and academia all participate in this meeting, where they expect to develop a Ministerial Declaration and a set of recommendations for the Economic and Social Council to take forward. Here, Soroptimist International highlights the ways in which our experience has shown we can, together, meet our goals for education, particularly for women and girls.

the undervaluing of females create environments where girls cannot perform to their potential or may not be able to participate at all. These barriers remain a constant challenge throughout women's lifetimes. Most educational aid targets children and adolescents, leaving already vulnerable women without access to learning opportunities.

How can we ensure that girls can both enrol in school and achieve their full potential? How can we transform schools rife with violence, physical and non physical, into safe spaces for learning? How can we improve the lives and status of the millions of adult women who were not afforded educational opportunities and are now past the traditional age for schooling?

We build toilets. We encourage partnerships. We create safe spaces for learning for women and girls of all ages. We talk to young girls and value, respect, and support their views. We reach out to marginalised women that society has overlooked. We begin a genuine dialogue and, together, address needs. And we see results.

Soroptimist International, a global voice for women and girls representing

nearly 90,000 individuals from 124 countries/territories, ensures that women and girls are afforded opportunities to access education in safe, healthy, and equitable environments throughout their lifetime. We operate under a skills and confidence framework to improve educational outcomes whilst creating empowering opportunities. Across the globe, Soroptimists are running hundreds of successful local, national, and international projects supporting women and girls to achieve their fullest potential, providing the tools to transform lives. Our experiences illustrate both what works and what we still need to do.

The situations in India, New Zealand, and Cameroon are not hopeless; on the contrary, they are easily remediable. Soroptimists in the UK and India teamed up to build six new toilets with proper sanitation facilities in a girls' school in Calcutta. The toilets have come as a great gain to the girls who are eager to complete their schooling now that there has been a vast improvement in the health and sanitary conditions in the school environment. Absenteeism is almost non-existent.

Across New Zealand, Soroptimists are running workshops to educate girls on behavioural issues, text and cyber bullying, dating violence and girl fighting. 225 girls, 45 parents and all teaching staff at a local school were involved in the pilot workshop which is now being replicated in other schools.

Soroptimists in Cameroon started an Adult Literacy Programme to cater for older women who were deprived of education, female dropouts, and street girls. Of the first intake of students, nine candidates were presented with the First School Leaving Certificate Examination (FSLC) run by the Government of Cameroon, and all nine candidates passed scoring 100%. 19 pupils will be entered for the same exam in the programme's second year.

These solutions are not prohibitively expensive or time-consuming. They do not rely on complex policies or research studies. They do not need large powerful organisations with influence and authority to drive change. What they do need are local women and girls, working together, to identify ways to make schools safe, to reach out to marginalised women, and to understand the unique needs of different groups of women and girls. These solutions are simple yet effective, as long as the women and girls affected by the work are involved in the work. This focus on safe spaces for education, marginalised groups, and the importance of both formal and non-formal education across the life cycle improves the social and economic status of women and girls, above and beyond what we can achieve by increasing enrolment rates.

As we all know, '[i]nvestment in girls' education reduces female fertility rates, lowers infant and child mortality rates, increases women's labour force participation

rates and earnings and fosters educational investment in children. All of these outcomes not only improve the quality of life, they also foster faster economic growth.' (World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2009) There is no better way to uphold international commitments to women and girls than by empowering them with skills, confidence, choice, and opportunity. Education must be accessible, acceptable, available, and of good quality to women and girls, regardless of economic, social, political, or geographic contexts. Quality education for women and girls is achievable, sustainable, and beneficial to all.

With this in mind, Soroptimist International makes the following recommendations to the Economic and Social Council to meet the internationally agreed goals and commitments with regard to education:

- recognise that **quality and breadth of education** must be as much a priority as enrolment rates for women, girls, men, and boys - an equal opportunity to learn is no less a human right than the right to be enrolled in school;
- ensure that women and girls, alongside men and boys, have **accessible, acceptable, available, and good quality education**, formal as well as non-formal. Awareness-raising programmes that inform girls of their rights and how to claim those rights must be widely implemented, as well as programmes that educate men, boys, families, educators, community, political and religious leaders;
- ensure that girls are **not at risk of violence**, assault or abuse on their way to and from school, and that the school environment is not one where violence can easily occur;
- guarantee that all schools have gender and culturally sensitive **sanitation facilities**;
- strengthen **legal frameworks** and systems of justice, and where necessary enact new laws to prevent, prosecute and punish all cases of violence that prevent girls and young women from participating in education;
- provide women and girls with equal access to complete **secondary education**, recognising that the longer women remain in education, the greater the cumulative intergenerational benefits for their children as well as the economy and wider society;
- invest in policies and programmes which take a **life-course approach** to education, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages, and that women and girls have different needs at different times in their lives;
- ensure that **gender disaggregated data** is collected, analyzed and acted upon in all above areas to promote future investment by society in the benefits of educating women and girls to society;
- take a **human rights based approach** to education, bringing particular attention and focus to the participation of women and girls, as well as men and boys, in decision-making and policy setting in a broad range of settings including both the public and private spheres; and
- understand that education is more than traditional learning and classroom settings, but rather should take a **holistic approach** including the skills and confidence framework championed by Soroptimist International, available to women and girls of all ages.

Soroptimist International, a global voice for women and girls from a wide socio-economic spectrum, presents the participants of the 55th Commission on the Status of Women with a challenge. Can we, as advocates and activists for women and girls, take the courageous and controversial steps to achieve true, meaningful, and sustainable gender equality in education and employment? Can we look beyond numbers and dig into the underlying economic, social, and cultural determinants of women and girls' ability to achieve their fullest potential in education and employment? Soroptimist International calls upon government officials, representatives of civil society, the private sector, and all interested parties to join together in collaboration and partnership to make a difference. We submit the following statement illustrating some of the fundamental barriers Soroptimist International has identified through our global network of 90,000 women in 125 countries and women and girl driven recommendations to overcome these barriers.

Learning and leadership for girls and women at all ages is the foundation for development, economic growth, and poverty reduction. Despite clear benefits, we live in a world where many women lack basic skills in reading and writing, in both the Global North and South. Quality of education must be as much a priority as enrolment rates - an

equal opportunity to learn is no less a human right than the right to be enrolled in school. Girls from minority backgrounds or rural communities are far less likely to enrol in school, and, if they do, are less likely to achieve the same outcomes as their peers. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, and even low self esteem create environments where girls cannot perform to their potential. These barriers remain a constant challenge throughout women's lifetimes. Most educational aid targets children and adolescents, leaving already vulnerable women without access to learning opportunities.

Soroptimist International works to ensure that women and girls have access to skills and confidence throughout their lifetime to enable improved outcomes and achievements in education and employment. Across the globe, there are hundreds of successful local, national, and international Soroptimist projects working to educate and empower girls and women. Our experience illustrates both what works and what we still need to do. With this in mind, Soroptimist International urges governments, civil society, and partners to:

The following statement was submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women, a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Every year, representatives of Member States gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. The theme of the 55th session to which this statement was submitted was "Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work." SI's statement highlighted our experience and recommendations for policy setting under this theme.



Soroptimists at CSW 55



- Ensure that policies and programmes take a **life-course approach** to education and employment, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages, and that women and girls have different needs at different times in their lives.
 - Improve and prioritise appropriately **disaggregated** (including but not limited to gender, sex, age, and ethnicity) and internationally comparable data collection, encompassing process and outcome indicators. It is unacceptable to allow numbers and statistics to mask underlying inequalities.
 - Work with local partners to improve facilities so that women and girls are afforded education that is **accessible, acceptable, available, and of good quality**. This includes gender appropriate and sensitive sanitation facilities, safe environments, dormitories for girls, and other aspects as required.
 - Take a **human rights based approach** to education and employment, bringing particular attention and focus to the participation of women and girls in decision-making and policy setting in a broad range of settings including both the public and private spheres.
 - Understand that education is more than traditional learning and classroom settings, but rather should take a **holistic** approach including the skills and confidence framework
- championed by Soroptimist International.
 - Take the necessary steps to **change societal perceptions** of traditionally ‘female’ dominated fields such as teaching, nursing, care-giving, and domestic work to show the phenomenal impact and importance of these professions. We must collectively increase our valuation of these professions, both culturally and economically, and to ensure that these professions are remunerated in ways that adequately reflect their impact and importance.
 - Consider also that by encouraging women to enter into traditionally ‘male’ dominated fields, there may be an inherent and underlying message that traditionally ‘female’ dominated fields are of lesser quality and importance. Alongside encouraging women to enter into traditionally ‘male’ dominated fields, we also must work to **encourage men** to enter into traditionally ‘female’ dominated fields to truly overcome and change occupational segregation. The unconscious bias in job selection works both ways.
- Legislate and advocate for **increased paternity leave**; women and men must have equal access to achieving a work-life balance, thus changing societal perceptions of the gender stereotypes in childcare and taking the first steps towards equalising career progression. Additionally, as noted by many experts in the field, improving return to work schemes for both women and men will also work towards equality.
 - Approach sex or gender based quotas with careful planning and ensure that women, from an early age, are **fully equipped with all of the knowledge and skills necessary** to take on leadership roles for which there may be allocations or other similar mechanisms. Otherwise, we are creating a system that inadvertently sets women up to fail, thus reinforcing antiquated sexist perspectives.

A woman who is given a position because of her sex, not her qualifications, is not achieving gender equality. On the other hand, a woman who is given a job because she has had equal and meaningful access to education through her life, has been afforded the same opportunities as men, has achieved her fullest potential, and is fully qualified for the position – that achieves true gender equality.