

Executive Summary



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educate women
and girls today to
create the **leaders** of
tomorrow

Soroptimist International is a vibrant, dynamic organisation for today's professional and business women. We are committed to a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. Our current strategic goal in programme work is to ensure that women and girls enjoy equality, live in safe, healthy and equitable environments, have access to education and have leadership and practical skills.

We value:

- Human rights for all
- Global peace and international goodwill
- Advancing women's potential
- Integrity and democratic decision making
- Volunteering, diversity and friendship

In 2010, Soroptimist International, for the first time in its 89 year history, opened a worldwide vote for members to participate in setting SI's international focus. Members worldwide overwhelmingly voted education and leadership for women and girls as the issue on which they wish to concentrate for the foreseeable future. From this decision, this global impact report was born to show how Soroptimists are changing the lives of women and girls for the better. We also highlight the most pressing challenges and solutions in accessing education and leadership.

The essence of the Soroptimist model is simple: educate women and girls today to create the leaders of tomorrow. To achieve this, we *educate* women and girls with skills, we *empower* them with the confidence to use those skills, and we work in the wider community to *enable* opportunities which will result in improved lives for women, girls, and communities worldwide.

Soroptimist International is deeply grounded in connecting the local actions undertaken by clubs and members to our global advocacy and awareness raising work, through a continuous feedback loop. We gather as much useful and relevant information as possible through our work at the UN and via our global partnerships which we then share with Soroptimists around the world. That on-the-ground perspective in turn informs our international work, so that SI can responsibly advocate on behalf of women and girls worldwide.

From January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010 (through June 2011 for advocacy work),

Soroptimists¹

- have undertaken projects aimed at increasing access to education and leadership skills for **90,089** women and girls
- have reported **2,629** projects in education and leadership
- have raised **\$3,044,224.00** towards these goals
- report an almost **1:1 member to beneficiary** ratio
- reach on average **34 women and/or girls** per project
- authored **13 UN statements**, 4 oral and 9 written
- contributed to, and/or supported 9 joint NGO statements, **3 oral** and **6 written**
- organised **19** formal panels/workshops/side events at UN conferences, meetings, and events

SI's top performing/reporting countries are **Turkey, Mauritius, India, Kenya, the Solomon Islands, the US, the UK, and Italy.**

Soroptimist International uses an online reporting system to capture information about club work around the world. As the reporting system is currently only available in English and requires an internet connection, we recognise that we are not able to fully report on Soroptimist actions around the world. In 2010, the countries for which we have no reports represent 5% of SI countries worldwide. We estimate that approximately 70% of SI work under the banner of education and leadership is reported. This figure is estimated by examining the number of clubs in the countries which are not reporting, and comparing the total number of projects reported against the total number of clubs, taking into account that some clubs will report more than one project. Our data will be skewed towards the demographic of clubs which can access and engage with the reporting system more easily. Information from the countries in Soroptimist International of the Americas was compiled separately and from club participation in and the impact of the Women's Opportunity Awards and Violet Richardson Award, two SIA-supported programs addressing education and leadership for women and girls.



SI Dewsbury (UK) Primrose Project

90,089 women and girls served

A global
voice for
women
and girls



Of note in our international advocacy work,

- SI submitted *two written statements on education and leadership* to high level, international conferences at the UN
- 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 Commission on the Status of Women ('CSW')
- approximately *200+ attendees* learned about our mission and our work at CSW 55, through our *workshops on access to education*
- 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
- 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
- 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 nominated three agents of change.
- *SI UN Representatives* in Geneva, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Nairobi, and New York are all extremely active in raising awareness, advocating, and formulating policies to advance education and leadership for women and girls.

Challenges

SI has analysed the worldwide situation facing women and girls, the wealth of information provided by our representatives at the UN, information gleaned from our participation in global advocacy work, and, most importantly, the information provided by our on the ground workforce of Soroptimists to identify priority challenges...and solutions.

1. Unsuitable and/or unsafe physical environments.
2. Costs.
3. Lack of infrastructure/not enough teachers, particularly female teachers.
4. A historical focus on enrolment which overlooked quality of education, retention, and transition from one level of education to the next and, eventually, to work.
5. Lack of attention paid to adult women/second chance educational opportunities, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy skills.
6. Not enough focus on the specific needs of adolescent girls.
7. Lack of 'girl friendly' spaces for non-formal education.
8. Demands on time. (e.g., domestic duties in water collection, caretaking, food preparation, etc.)
9. Financing and government commitment. The global economic crisis has put basic services at great risk of cutbacks.
10. Access to training and public exposure for potential women leaders.

Solutions

Solutions are often low cost, easy to implement, and directly correlate to transformative outcomes. In other words, a **little goes a long way** for the women and girls with whom Soroptimists work.

1. Increase enrolment, retention, and survival rates for girls, particularly in secondary education
 - a. Raise awareness in the wider community; raising awareness about the importance and the benefits of educating girls and young women has a strong association with increased enrolment.
 - b. Provide well governed financial assistance to those most in need; as poverty is well known barrier to accessing education, creating systems that alleviate this financial burden have a lasting impact. At government level, abolishing school fees can often have a significant effect. At local level, financial incentives and free education for those most in need are successful models.
 - c. Ensure a girl-friendly physical environment, such as proper sanitation facilities (e.g. toilets), safe transport to and from school, or gender appropriate safe housing during term times.
2. Support girls and women in the transition from school to work
 - a. Provide responsive non-formal educational opportunities
 - b. Ensure that women are equipped with the vocational skills necessary to secure stable employment (particularly in the fields of health, education, and agriculture).
3. Address the learning needs of adult women
 - a. Roll out 'second chance' programmes providing women with literacy (including financial literacy), numeracy, and vocational skills.
 - b. Train female teachers; not only does this improve the lives of the women trained, but it also encourages girls to attend school.
4. Increase women's participation in decision-making
 - a. Offer non-formal education, particularly around leadership skills, to adult women
 - b. Provide training opportunities specifically for women to take on leadership roles.



Soroptimists in Sri Lanka provided girl-appropriate books to a local library

Taking these into account, SI has identified a series of ‘**projects of excellence**’ and the rationale for why these projects are so good. In short, they

- Conduct a needs assessment before beginning work
- Involve the community
- Work in partnership
- Listen to the voices of the participants
- Are simple, inexpensive, but well thought out
- Realise that education is as much about the learning environment and safe physical access as it is about books and lessons
- Target those most in need and tailor work to the specific needs of women and girls
- Learn from best practice
- Translate into locally relevant work
- Regularly report, actively govern, and demand transparency
- Think sustainably and long-term

Regional Overview

Region	Identified Focus	Concerning statistic (non-SI)	SI presence
Africa	Keeping girls in school, particularly secondary school	Gender parity index in secondary school enrolment: 0.79	Africa reported the least number of projects, but with a high number of beneficiaries. In other words, fewer projects but more beneficiaries per project.
Asia Pacific	Adult female literacy	Gender parity index for adult literacy: In South & West Asia: 0.7 In East Asia & the Pacific: 0.94	Asia Pacific reported the second highest numbers of projects, favouring education over leadership.
Europe	Focus on women in decision-making	Percentage of female parliamentarians in Europe (EXCLUDING Nordic countries): 20%	Europe reported the highest number of beneficiaries with a heavy focus on education. Although in Europe the total funds raised are average, the average funds raised per project is quite high. However, with a large number of members, funds raised per member are actually the lowest.

SI reviewed our work by geographic region.

Regional Overview

Region	Identified Focus	Concerning statistic (non-SI)	SI presence
Latin America	Intra-country disparities	Research shows that statistics in this region mask the intra-country discriminatory practices that leave vulnerable women and girls without access to education and leadership	Latin America reported average figures across the board.
Middle East	Getting girls into primary school	Gender Parity Index - primary school enrolment: 0.92 Gender Parity Index - school life expectancy primary and secondary school: 0.90	The Middle East reported a very high ratio of projects and beneficiaries per club and member and raised a significant amount of funds. Although this region reported the least number of leadership projects, political contexts may negatively influence opportunities.
North America	Women as leaders in their profession	% female teachers – tertiary school: 42%	North America reported the most projects and most funds raised, very high ratios of projects to clubs, but low ratios of beneficiaries to clubs and members. North America also showed a more even balance between education and leadership projects

This is what we found.