



## **Advocacy Resource Pack**

**63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of  
Women**

**Social protection systems, access to public services  
and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and  
the empowerment of women and girls**

**11-22 March 2019**

**United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Welcome to the Soroptimist International Advocacy Resource Pack. This pack should equip you with key information to support you in your Soroptimist advocacy work at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63), making it possible for Soroptimists to speak with a global voice for women and girls on the priority theme, *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*. Please keep this with you whilst you attend events and meet with members of other organisations. All the positions in this pack are based on the grassroots expertise of Soroptimist clubs from across the world and are founded on the mission of Soroptimist International (SI) to transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities.

To help your understanding of SI's position and to assist your CSW63 preparation:

- Understand and read further about SI's six Key Asks (pages 3-7) so that you can speak to others about them, and acquaint yourself with SI's Written Statement for CSW63 (page 7);
- Familiarise yourself with SI's agreed positions papers, Where We Stand statements, (page 7);
- Take any opportunity offered to attend meetings with your country mission or arrange to meet with a representative before you arrive in New York;
- Talk to other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and gain their support for SI's Key Asks. You may be able to reciprocate in relation to their asks;
- Attend the Regional Caucus Group meetings for your country;
- Keep in touch with other members of the SI CSW delegation;
- Consider joining SI's writing group to work on CSW63's Agreed Conclusions (pages 7-8).

In September 2015, countries adopted the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), a set of seventeen aspirational 'Global Goals' with 169 targets between them, officially known as 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', to be achieved by 2030. On page 3 you will find an infographic of the 17 SDGs. The work of SI over the coming years will focus on implementation of the SDGs with like-minded civil society organisations and UN bodies, particularly focusing on SDG 4 - Quality Education, SDG 5 - Gender Equality and SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation.

We do hope that you will find this Advocacy Resource Pack useful, before, during and after CSW63. Please use the information to guide your inputs and as a reference point for your own perspective as a Soroptimist and for your knowledge of Soroptimist projects.

As Soroptimists, we must ensure that the voices of women and girls across the world are listened to and their needs and opinions heard. We call on governments to act to educate, empower and enable women and girls. We must all continue to look at the world through women's eyes.

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## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



### Soroptimist International's Key Asks

SI supports the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through its programmes to educate, enable and empower women and girls at a grassroots level, advocating on behalf of women and girls to ensure that no one is left behind.

SI has established six Key Asks relating to the priority theme, these are that:

1. Women and girls be given access to free, quality education throughout their lives to enable them to move out of poverty;
2. Women and girls be given equal access to employment opportunities, with a minimum living wage and the provision of accessible financial support, and training enabling those who wish to develop entrepreneurial skills;
3. Governments provide safe access to water and sanitation for homes, schools and workplaces with the involvement of women in the community management of these facilities;
4. Governments implement nationally appropriate social protection systems, financial safety nets and measures, including floors to ensure that women and girls are protected throughout their lives;
5. Governments, communities, civil society and individuals must work together to change attitudes, behaviours, inequalities and system failures which negatively impact on the health of women and girls, with a focus on improving preventative and primary care;
6. Disaggregated data be collected, providing information to enable positive measures targeted at those most in need, to ensure no one is left behind.

These Key Asks are outlined in more detail below to give you a better understanding of SI's position:

**1. Women and girls be given access to free, quality education throughout their lives to enable them to move out of poverty**

Quality education accessible beyond the primary level, can be regarded as one of the major pillars of social protection, offering women and girls the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to engage in social entrepreneurship or find meaningful employment, thus enabling an income sufficient to sustain herself and her family. The education of boys to understand not only the importance but the value of gender equality is crucial.

Though there have been positive achievements, there are still numerous barriers facing girls or women who wish to pursue an education. Serious problems affecting the right to education persist in the discriminatory environment girls and women face on a daily basis. These barriers are often caused by poverty, harmful traditional norms and practices, poor infrastructure and violence. These barriers may surface from the moment a girl or woman wakes up to the time she goes to sleep. Girls forced into early marriage often have diminished access to continuing education; girls who are expected to work on family farms or assist with collection of water may never go to school; if secondary education is available to girls then they may regularly be missing from the classroom because of a lack of toilet facilities or taboos around menstruation. Information from the World Inequality Database on Education in 2018 shows that gender gaps in attainment are generally found among the poorest families, especially in rural areas and among indigenous or ethnic minority groups. When combined these factors mean that girls facing these circumstances are least likely to access education even if it is available.

For every community the education of girls and young women leads to increased economic productivity and income generation for her family and that community. By focusing on eliminating gender inequality in education, there will be gains in every other aspect of social, economic, cultural and political development, thus providing an underpinning social protection platform across all societies. Investment in girls' education, especially if aimed at improving its quality and coverage, yields a social benefit that has resulted in lower mortality rates, fewer unwanted births, and efforts to combat poverty, HIV/AIDS, and malnutrition. Girls' school attendance contributes to a decline in violence and harmful practices toward women and girls as well as leading to increases in per capita growth.

**2. Women and girls be given equal access to employment opportunities, with a minimum living wage and the provision of accessible financial support, and training enabling those who wish to develop entrepreneurial skills**

Training and skills, including access to modern technology are necessary for women and girls to achieve economic empowerment. Advances in information and communications technology, including telecommunications, computers and the Internet, have transformed the world, including in the field of education. There is a pressing need to address the major impediments that many countries face in accessing new technologies and bridging the digital divides, both between and within countries and between women and men. In addition to "harnessing" information and communications technologies for development, there is a recognised need to emphasize quality of access to bridge digital and knowledge divides, using a multidimensional approach that includes

speed, stability, affordability, language, local content and accessibility for persons with disabilities. Programmes such as UNESCO's MIL CLICKS are critical for safe, informed and productive use of information technologies.

In 2018, a report by UN-Women confirmed that access to the Internet was increasing exponentially and being used to communicate and share information in school settings, in workplaces and at home. However, women were still not being reached at the same pace as men. According to a study by UN Women, in 2017 the proportion of women using the Internet globally was 5.9 percentage points lower than for men. Women and girls must not be victims of this digital divide if they are to be successful in pursuing an education or surviving globalization.

### **3. Governments provide safe access to water and sanitation for homes, schools and workplaces with the involvement of women in the community management of these facilities**

Millions of women and girls each year suffer from a lack of access to clean water, water-related diseases and lack of sanitation in communities and schools. The impact of climate change on water supply and collection is disproportionately affecting women, particularly those in rural areas.

Improvements to infrastructure such as transportation and school facilities are needed. In order to successfully pursue her education, a woman or girl must have access to safe and affordable transportation to travel to and from the educational venue. Once there, it must be an environment which provides everyone with access to safe sanitation and hygiene facilities, taking into account the specific needs of young women and girls for menstrual hygiene management and of persons with disabilities, without compromising their safety and dignity.

### **4. Governments implement nationally appropriate social protection systems, financial safety nets and measures, including floors to ensure that women and girls are protected throughout their lives**

Nationally appropriate Social Protection systems and measures including social protection floors have been recognised as playing an important part in addressing the poverty and vulnerability of women, children, older persons, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Social protection floors have great potential in facilitating the enjoyment of the rights to education, social security, health, food, shelter and water, in accordance with the obligations of States under international human rights law. When used as a floor and not a ceiling for protection, social protection floors can contribute significantly to gender equality and the realisation of minimum essential levels of those rights especially for marginalized groups.

Social protection is seen as an investment in people and thus in long-term social and economic development. Nationally appropriate social protection systems and floors make a critical contribution to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at poverty eradication and exerting a positive impact on economic growth, social cohesion and social development. They have an essential role to play in building resilient and environmentally friendly societies, supporting removal of inequalities emphasised by gender.

For decades, Member States have been entering into agreements and adopting resolutions which provide for many forms of social protection for women and girls. However, for many women and girls, personal and family safety, access to education, economic security, food security, safe shelter and a healthy life are a long way from being achieved. It is no longer acceptable that action has not been taken or is implemented slowly. In order to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, Governments must immediately act on the promises given so that no one is left behind.

**5. Governments, communities, civil society and individuals must work together to change attitudes, behaviours, inequalities and system failures which negatively impact on the health of women and girls, with a focus on improving preventative and primary care**

A healthy society requires access to knowledge and information in all forms of health education for women and girls research showing that this will lead to healthier families and communities. Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said in 2010 that education and health go hand in hand. The evidence demonstrating the links is overwhelming. We know, too, that the education of girls brings an especially high payback for health. In this sense, education and health are a sisterhood.

Education is a powerful way to break the cycle of poverty, ill health, misery, and low status passed on from one generation of women to the next. UNESCO supports this view stating, “A good quality education is the foundation of health and well-being. For people to lead healthy and productive lives, they need knowledge to prevent sickness and disease. For children and adolescents to learn, they need to be well nourished and healthy. Statistics from UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report show that the attainment of higher levels of education among mothers improves children’s nutrition and vaccination rates, while reducing preventable child deaths, maternal mortality and HIV”.

Failures in health systems, reactive policy making, and deeply rooted gender inequalities at family, community, and national levels have combined to create a devastating impact on women’s health throughout her life cycle. Not only do women and girls face a specific set of health-related concerns, they also face sometimes insurmountable barriers to accessing services. Governments, communities, civil society and individuals must work together to change attitudes and behaviours, inequalities, and system failures which negatively impact on the health of women and girls, with a focus on improving preventative and primary care.

Education enables women and girls to access information regarding reproductive and sexual rights and healthcare through all stages of their lives. The education of men and boys about the shared responsibility of child-bearing and other matters relating to sexuality and reproduction is also important. It is critical that men and boys are engaged in such educational programmes providing them with an understanding of the rights of women and girls over choices for their own bodies and their own lives. This in turn can provide protection from early marriage and female genital mutilation and offer routes for release from domestic violence and other forms of abuse, both mental and physical.



**6. Disaggregated data be collected, providing information to enable positive measures targeted at those most in need, to ensure no one is left behind.**

Monitoring programs is important. It is critical that statistics are collected which are thorough and transparent, using gender sensitive statistics and indicators. Gender specific statistics are fundamental as a means to developing appropriate financing strategies, for the fulfilment of human rights and gender equality commitments and to monitor progress toward Sustainable Development Goals targets.

In order to take into account gender-specific disadvantages and needs, it is important to compile gender disaggregated data in many other areas, e.g. the distribution of property and assets between women and men, sensitive issues like gender-based violence. Gender-sensitive indicators will specify whether inequality between the sexes has increased or decreased over time, e.g. in the employment sector, indicators measure access to productive resources or wage ratios.

Such categories of data and indicators should be collected nationally, regionally and globally in order to measure gender gaps and consequently adjust development programmes to rectify inequalities and to ensure women's empowerment and provide social protection floors. At a minimum, data disaggregated on the basis of age, sex, geography, income, disability, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity and other factors relevant to monitoring inequalities (including multiple inequalities experienced by women and girls) should be available to inform of the progress toward 2030.

## **Soroptimist International's Written Statement for CSW63**

NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may submit written statements on the thematic issues considered by CSW, in accordance with [Council resolution 1996/31](#). Submission of written statements was open for these NGOs until 22 October 2018. Soroptimist International and Associated Country Women of the World released a joint statement, *Social Protection for Women and Girls; Sustainability Through Education*. Please click [here](#) to view SI's written statement for CSW63.

Please click [here](#) to view the positions of other NGOs.

## **Soroptimist International's Where We Stand statements**

SI's Where We Stand statements are agreed position papers which present the intersections between the SDGs, gender and a thematic area. The position papers present clear actions to be taken and are designed to help all Soroptimists present an agreed position when they are lobbying others. Please click [here](#) to view SI's current statements.

## **Working towards Agreed Conclusions**

Each year, the principal output of CSW is the Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme. This document contains an analysis of the priority theme and a set of concrete recommendations for

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In General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council, United Nations (ECOSOC); Operational Relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); Special List of the International Labour Organisation (ILO); Official Relations with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Consultative Status with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO); Consultative Status with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions, civil society actors and relevant stakeholders, to be implemented at the international, national, regional and local level. The Agreed Conclusions advance how gender equality will be included in development efforts moving forward.

Negotiations on the text of Agreed Conclusions by member state representatives starts several weeks before CSW. SI has formed a writing group to review, analyse and make recommendations to member state representatives. By influencing these representatives, it is possible to improve and develop the commitments made in the Agreed Conclusions. NGOs endeavour to maintain text which has been agreed in previous years or is contained within existing UN Resolutions or agreements. SI's writing group aims to safeguard women's rights on some of the most contentious issues.

If you wish to join this writing group, particularly if you are attending CSW63 for the second week as this is when the main negotiations take place, please inform SI Director of Advocacy, Bev Bucur, [bevannbucur@gmail.com](mailto:bevannbucur@gmail.com).

Please view here the previous CSW Agreed Conclusions: [CSW62](#), [CSW61](#), [CSW60](#).

## CSW63 Review theme

Each CSW also provides a review theme, with the opportunity to review a previous year's priority theme. The review theme for CSW63 is *Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development (agreed conclusions of the sixtieth session)*.

Previous approaches to development which included women only on 'women's issues', were widely ineffective because they failed to take into account the different ways in which women and girls are affected by social, economic and development issues. This meant many women and girls were left behind and failed to experience the benefits of sustainable development. SI highlighted during CSW60 that such a siloed approach cannot continue.

All countries hold the same responsibility to ensure the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within their own borders, and to support other countries in achieving the SDGs which includes reaffirming and contributing to the fulfilment of gender equality. The need for a cross-cutting, inclusive and gender-sensitive approach is clear: without this approach the global transformation envisaged by the SDGs will not be achieved. Women and girls are crucial contributors, implementers and beneficiaries of sustainable development. Their empowerment as equal partners is fundamental to the achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda.

The stand-alone SDG on gender equality (SDG 5) should be celebrated, as it outlines targets for every country to make gender equality a reality. However, SDG 5 does not stand in isolation and will not on its own achieve a gender-equal world. A multidimensional gender-sensitive approach must be implemented across the board for the 2030 Development Agenda to be successful. Approaching gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in the SDGs requires that gender is included at all stages of policy development, means of implementation, monitoring and accountability.

Please click [here](#) for further recommended reading for CSW63.

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