

## Where We Stand Statement:

### Access to Life Long Learning/Continuing Education

#### Where Things Stand

Access to high-quality extended education and training throughout the life course transforms lives and communities. The cross-cutting benefits of education and training for sustainable development, and the fundamental role it plays in the achievement of gender equality was globally recognised specifically by Sustainable Development Goal #4 but also across other SDGs. Education is a basic human right as established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Additionally the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the Human Right to Education: - A/HRC/41/L.26 adopted July 11,2019.

It is now widely acknowledged that as well as benefitting women and girls as individuals, educating women and girls throughout their life course produces better health outcomes, fuels economic growth, and ensures stable and peaceful societies.

The concept of 'cradle to grave' education has been fundamental to the development of education and training systems over many years. However, it is often the case that formal education becomes the focus of educational efforts within sustainable development, particularly due to the efforts carried out to achieve the MDGs and SDGs and the large amount of information already available on formal primary, secondary and tertiary based education. It is critical that more recognition is given to informal education such as in health care or 'on the job' skills development which contributes to knowledge in societies and the economy. Frequently women and girls are more present in this 'informal' sector so to not fully recognise informal education goes hand in hand with not recognising the knowledge and contributions of women.

Vocational education and training are often seen as 'additional' or 'subsidiary' to formal education received at primary and secondary levels. Data for this area is not always kept or published so in many countries vocational training offering skills which contribute to the local economy are not included in reports.

For Skills development the ILO was instrumental in assisting in the development of a common global training strategy "A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth", which was adopted by the G20 leaders in 2011.

Education and learning is not only about skills and jobs – it is about the quality of life and dignity of people. Many women including older women, who were deprived of education in their childhoods have suffered a lifetime of discrimination particularly in terms of education and employment.

Education and training in later life have numerous positive effects not only in a better understanding of areas such as health issues but also in terms of being better equipped to manage financial resources; to support the educational and social needs of others; stronger resilience to man made and natural disasters and civic engagement.

Knowledge and skills throughout the life course can make a significant difference to ending poverty. Re-training and continuous skill development are essential for those women looking to enter the world of work as well as those changing or wanting to progress their careers. Accessible and inclusive vocational training apprenticeships, skills training and other job orientated training are all key in this regard. These opportunities are particularly important for women who need to adapt to

new environments be it because they are migrants, their life circumstances have changed because they have become widowed or need to support their family or because ways of communication and technology and the types of work available has changed.

Older women who for a variety of reasons have not yet been able to access the education they need to live fulfilled lives should not be excluded from sustainable development efforts and should be included in the collection of education statistics. Their inclusion in all forms of education and training will further promote and enhance sustainable development on the individual, familial and community levels.

### **And Where Things Need to Go**

Solid foundations for learning need to be established across the lifespan, not just by giving universal access to primary education. States and civil society are urged to make all forms of life long learning available and financially supported. This should include:

- Economic empowerment for women and girls should be enhanced through vocational skills training.
- Provision should be made for life skill courses such as on health and maternal care, water and energy management, financial literacy and traditional skills for women and girls which will lead to improvements for communities and families.
- Language programmes and conversion courses should be provided for migrant and refugee women and girls to ensure that assimilation and contribution to the new area or country is positive.
- Access to all forms of new technology for women of all ages supports and enables economic and sustainable development for communities.

### **Fundamental Action**

Member States are urged to:

- fulfil existing obligations in international treaties and agreements relating to equal access to education and training specifically CEDAW and the G20 commitments to developing a skilled workforce.
- prioritise quality education and training for women and girls throughout their lifespan as a necessary foundation for the achievement of all development goals, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Agenda.
- uphold international agreements to ensure that girls and women are not at risk of violence, assault or abuse on their way to and from educational and training facilities, and ensure that domestic policies and justice systems are designed to protect women and girls in educational and training settings
- pledge to work towards policies and programmes with 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 learning needs at different times in their lives
- collect sex-disaggregated data on enrolment, retention, and completion, as well as sex-disaggregated data on all outcomes to ensure that women and girls are afforded equal access to learning throughout life.
- work toward gender inclusive budget programmes which enable and support women in all circumstances to engage in basic education, vocational training and other skills development at any stage in their lives.

### **Additional Action**

All State and civil society contributors are asked to recognise and contribute to ensure that:

- Systems of continuing education and training become more accessible for girls and women of all ages, including by recognising non-formal or non-traditional qualifications and experiences, understanding that women may have been unable to participate in formal education for a range of reasons but still have critical skills, knowledge and experience that mean that they are well qualified to participate in educational courses.
- There is an expansion of all forms of supporting apprenticeships and scholarships and funding for vocational education especially technical, engineering and scientific programmes specifically for women and girls.

### **Where Soroptimist International Stands**

These are the principles that Soroptimist international strongly supports and will advocate for and on behalf of women and girls, believing life long learning is a fundamental continuation of the right to basic education and a necessary follow on to achieve sustainable development and improved societies.

- Soroptimists support all actions of governments, intergovernmental institutions and civil society to promote, improve and enable the provision of continuing education and training provision whatever their age;
- Soroptimists encourage all governments and other providers to create or ensure safe physical environments in all education and training such as proper sanitation facilities, clean water, and safe transport;
- Soroptimists will engage with governmental and civil society partners to monitor data and programmes to measure progress toward gender equality and life long learning.

Soroptimists recognise the 2020 commitment by Member States at CSW to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to achieve gender equality especially in the promotion of education and training for women and girls. This has further strengthened the need to achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has provided added impetus for the inclusion of programmes of life long learning for women to ensure they are able to contribute to the revitalisation of communities and economies effectively.

Main Resources:

OECD 2001 Life Long Learning for All