

Statement to the High-Level Political Forum, 2020

Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realising the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

Soroptimist International, Associated Country Women of the World and Women for Water Partnership recognise that the right to food, water and human rights are inextricably interconnected and urge States to examine the ways and means of overcoming obstacles to the realisation of the basic right to sufficient food.

Food security is constantly compromised and threatened by climate change, armed conflict, population growth, inadequate water supply, over-harvesting of plants, fish, and wildlife, and the destruction of wild food habitats that leads to diminished food resources.

Rural women, in particular, play a vital role in agricultural production, a critical component of food security. However, they are often unable to reach their full potential due to discriminatory societal policies and laws. Women are less likely to own their own land, property laws discriminate against women inheriting family property, widows are discarded in their rights to inherit from their deceased husbands.

Now added to these are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These barriers not only threaten the food security of rural women and their families, but the wider world as family farms are responsible for more than 80 per cent of the world's food production. Though holding only 15 per cent of the land, rural women account for 43 per cent globally of the agricultural workforce (80 per cent in developing countries).

Soroptimist International (SI) is a global volunteer movement of women, active for almost 100 years, with a network of over 75,000 club members in 122 countries. SI's mission is to transform the lives and status of women and girls and to accomplish this, members work at a local, national and international level to Educate, Empower and Enable opportunities for women and girls.

All three organisations have representatives at seven UN centres in the world actively advocating for human rights and gender equality ensuring women's voices are heard there. The membership supports and initiates grassroots projects that help and sustain women and girls to achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in communities worldwide.

A recent Soroptimist International President's Appeal project: Women, Water, Leadership (WW&L) provides women and girls with the opportunity to get the education and vocational training they need to be an equal partner to manage the most essential ingredients of life: water (water security for all), sanitation, food and energy.

The WHO recommendation to wash hands frequently with soap and water highlights the lack of access to water and sanitation facilities in many countries. The restrictions on travel measures to prevent spread of the virus impacts heavily on women and girls when they need to reach farmed land, bring food to market (which leads to more food loss) or to access water for survival acting as caretakers for their families and communities. Water scarcity is also a driver for internal displacement and migration leading to female headed households as sole parent and care-taker.

The WASH in Health Care Facilities (HCF) Global Baseline Report in 2019 highlighted that one in four HCFs lacks basic water service (affecting more than 900 million people), one in five HCFs has no sanitation service (affecting about 1.5 billion people), and one in six HCFs has no hygiene service.

SI (SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL) LIMITED

www.soroptimistinternational.org

REGISTERED OFFICE: 8a Romsey Terrace, Cambridge, CB1 3NH UK COMPANY NUMBER 08670477

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).

Services should meet minimum quality standards and should be separated for infected vs. non-infected patients. There is still a long way to go to meet these standards.

The WW&L project unites Soroptimists worldwide as a global voice for women to increase awareness of the vital role of women as equal partners at all levels of the water sector in a programme empowering women and girls into leading positions in managing the water/food/energy nexus. Women and girls have the capacity, experience and education they need to take leadership in managing water and sanitation. The ripple effect of WW&L results in the empowerment of an astonishing amount of small holder women farmers that are economically independent, are experts in their field, started businesses and provide a better life for their communities and families. Work across countries in three continents demonstrates that the project is sustainable and can be replicated in all communities to the benefit of many.

Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) is a worldwide network of 28 women organisations active in the field of gender, water and sanitation and sustainable development. WfWP strives towards a water secure world: Equitable access to water for all, and for all uses as a key part of women's empowerment. A water secure world ensures women exercise their full potential to achieve sustainable and equitable development. WfWP positions women as active leaders and agents of change intersecting water, gender, food and vocational training. Linking day-to-day practice to national and international level and vice versa, makes WfWP a unique network and a linking pin between the grassroot level and national and international stakeholders. WfWP uses water as an entry point to women's empowerment, due to the central part that women play in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

Working toward SDG 6 and other water related targets to enable access to clean water and good sanitation means that women have to be included in all aspects of project development and management. They are the major players in understanding the needs of their communities and can ensure that development is practical, appropriate, affordable and sustainable.

The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) is a global network of rural women's organisations, representing more than nine million women living in rural and non-urban communities. Founded in 1929, ACWW held expert-consultant status with the League of Nations' Nutrition Committee, has continued into Consultative Status with the United Nations, and contributed to the creation of targets and indicators for both the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.

For more than 40 years, ACWW has funded small-scale, women-led food security, nutrition education, and sustainable agricultural projects in 52 less developed countries.

Women and girls in many areas will be facing lack of access to food, even where they may be main producers. Travel restrictions to local markets as well as social norms which dictate men and boys eat first may impact heavily and can mean women and girls become more malnourished, less healthy and more susceptible to infection by COVID – 19. It enhances food loss and waste and leads to internal displacement.

Whilst making vital local changes by supporting and implementing local solutions and initiatives, projects of this type cannot affect the systematic, institutional advancements necessary for global food security. This responsibility must lie with States Parties but must also be informed by rural women who have experience and expertise, to achieve genuine change.

These are the actions we propose for the future:

SI (SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL) LIMITED

www.soroptimistinternational.org

REGISTERED OFFICE: 8a Romsey Terrace, Cambridge, CB1 3NH UK COMPANY NUMBER 08670477

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).

– Each State should adopt a legal and institutional framework that assists those within its jurisdiction to provide for food security, including water rights, land rights, transportation systems, and food storage and distribution systems.

-States should sign on to and implement legal frameworks to implement the rights to water and sanitation.

– States should fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, including creating appropriate legal measures to incorporate the Convention into domestic law. This must include a functional institutional mechanism, and an understanding of Article 14 as a critical step in strengthening food security.

– States should fully implement their Paris Agreement COP21 commitments, by supporting women in mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts and thus to prevent deterioration of human rights, including the rights to food, water, and land.

-States should recognise the role women play in food production, forestry, fishery and water management and include them in discussions and decision making relating to food production and food security, and water management.

– States should provide access to vocational training, lifelong learning opportunities and capacity building that target women and girls and support their roles in improving food security and water management and empower them to be leaders, experts and agents of change.

-States should enable gender-sensitive health care and WASH provision to support women and girls not just for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic but at all times.

With increasing risk to food production and access to clean water and sanitation all actors must adjust their platforms for discussion to include women from all levels of society and ensure that the voices especially of rural women do not remain unheard. The 2030 Agenda recognised the need to move globally to a fairer and more equitable world. A decade into achieving the SDGs the outcomes have been endangered by COVID-19, with many women and girls facing poverty, food scarcity and even starvation, as well as loss of life. Now more than ever we have to ensure that women and girls are supported and empowered to play a leading role in the emerging future.