Quadrennial Brochure 2015-2019

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

Educate to Lead: Nepal 2015-17

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Prepared by Soroptimist International for the 2015-19 Quadrennium

Yvonne Simpson, QSM, SI President 2015-17

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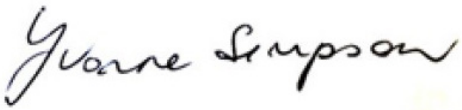
"The 2015 – 2017 biennium brought much success and progress for women and girls through the efforts of an extensive team of Soroptimist members, volunteers and staff.

Five priority areas for the organisation were identified: Global Advocacy, where dedicated delegations give a voice to women and girls without one; Global Communications, sharing the Soroptimist International (SI) message and calls to action on key issues; the SI Convention, where Soroptimists and supporters come together every four years; Strategic Leadership, the strengthening and restructuring of our board and committee to assure a positive future for the international organisation. Lastly, the organisation's global project – the SI President's Appeal. For the 2015 – 2017 biennium I selected 'Educate to Lead: Nepal'. The Nepal earthquakes in 2015 were so disastrous, especially for women and girls, that to support the most vulnerable was an easy decision for me. I knew personally the pain of the 2011 earthquakes in my home city of Christchurch and I felt a very keen and personal connection to our sisters in Nepal. Education is the key tool for empowerment – and through the generosity of Soroptimist clubs, we have and will continue to make a difference to thousands.

I hope you enjoy reading about SI's successes to transform the lives and status of women and girls. We have been true to our mission!"



Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, Officer in The Order of Orange-Nassau, SI President 2017-19

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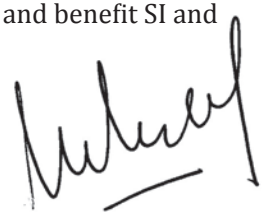
"The biennium 2017-2019 has been a time of great change and the implementation of a new SI Board structure. As the call for equal rights for women rises the world over, so too does the significance and importance of the role of women, clearly reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To empower women means structural issues such as attitudes and social norms must be addressed. Equal access to education, and legal frameworks and practices must be developed to position women as agents of change, and on an equal footing with men.

Women, water and agriculture are inseparable. Calling for a change in mind-set, my 'Women, Water & Leadership' SI President's Appeal moves beyond long-held stereotypes, elevating women's participation in the water sector as equal partners. Through sustainable water, education and agricultural projects in Malaysia, Bulgaria, Kenya and Indonesia, the SI Appeal empowers women and their communities, creating sustainable change.

Supporting the creation of an African SI Federation has been another focal point, and we are hoping that this will take effect in 2020. Furthermore, plans are underway for an online communication platform, to connect Soroptimists globally, increasing engagement in our global activities, which sustain and benefit SI and our planet.

Let us continue to progress and embrace every opportunity."



SI Implementing the SDGs

THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

Soroptimist International (SI), founded in 1921, has General Consultative Status with The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), since 1984. A global non-governmental organisation with a volunteer membership of almost 75,000 in 122 Countries, SI advocates on behalf of women and girls and through grassroots project work, actively contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), understanding that Gender Equality and the empowerment of women (SDG5), is integral to the achievement of all 17 goals – *without equality for women, the rest of the goals are unattainable.*

Australian Himalayan Foundation: Women's Vocational Training

EDUCATE TO LEAD: NEPAL

On 25 April 2015, a devastating earthquake displaced millions of people in Nepal. The Soroptimist International (SI) President's Appeal 2015-2017 'Educate to Lead: Nepal' was set up by President, Yvonne Simpson to provide support and vocational training to women and girls, increasing opportunities for empowerment, education and economic stability, through 20 projects, facilitating the tools and opportunities to rebuild lives and to strengthen the fight against continued poverty.

>>> 'Educate to Lead: Nepal' supported the Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF), improving educational outcomes in the Lower Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. Through the Teacher Training & Quality Education Programme (TTQE), the SI President's Appeal supported workshops to train and fast track 100 teachers - also offering Education Officers, government representatives and community stakeholders, gender sensitivity training, creating awareness across the region of gender issues within their communities. TTQE provided 14 girls at high-school level with vocational training in practical trades - sustainable programmes to ensure long-term livelihood opportunities and increased economic independence.

>>> 'Removing Barriers to Education in Nepal' in Thulipokhari is led by SI of Truckee Meadows, Reno, Nevada, fondly named the 'American Mothers' by village elders. Supporting the activities of the Soroptimist club which included building a school dormitory, and education scholarships for girls, resulting in the graduation of 900 girls. Funding from 'Educate to Lead: Nepal', provided room and board for a further twenty girls

in addition to tuition, books, supplies and uniforms.

>>> SI of Oita-Midoro of the Minami Region, Japan, has a long history supporting the indigenous women of Nepal's Tharu Village (Badrahani), located near Sauraha. Through the Tharu Women's Project, three training centres were built and thousands of women completed literacy courses, many gaining vocational skills to generate income opportunities. Girls recieved scholarships for tuition and micro-credit loans, to support their move into entrepreneurship. The SI President's Appeal enabled the purchase of 20 computers and computer literacy classes to 80 women and girls, and 10 teachers. The training is set to continue over the course of five years with a final goal of training 200 women.

>>> As part of a partnership with GEE Nepal, a foundation created by a young New Zealand Soroptimist, girls were educated in the rural Saptari region of Eastern Nepal, and 16 girls are enjoying five-year education scholarships, giving them the opportunity to complete secondary education.

>>> 'Classrooms in the Clouds' (CITC) was established in 2007, becoming registered as an NGO in Nepal in 2014. The SI President's Appeal facilitated the CITC Inspire Programme, with intensive training and mentoring for at least 10 CITC sponsored teachers, more than 1200 girls, in addition to 2 classroom educational Support Workers in schools in the remote regions of Nepal. Developing child-centred learning approaches using the Train the Trainer model, the Inspire Programme provides first aid and menstrual health training - a whole school community approach, supporting the advancement of gender equality and development of strong female role models through teachers and CITC partners in the school and village communities.

>>> Founded in 2007, Harambee Arts develops and delivers psychosocial activities, working to transform

Tharu Women's Project

and improve the lives of women and children suffering the devastating psychosocial impact of human trafficking, poverty, war, violence and illness. The SI President's Appeal funds a team of 7 trainers who travel throughout the country, supporting and educating girls and women, through 26 Expressive Arts Workshops. An intensive training programme was additionally developed for 14 young women to become certified as Harambee Arts Nepal facilitators.

>>> The SI President's Appeal and Days for Girls (DfG) sought to raise awareness and educate girls and women on menstrual hygiene, whilst creating sustainable access for environmentally-friendly and cost-effective menstrual hygiene products. Supporting the launch of

Days for Girls

five DfG Micro-Enterprises and a two-week training programme, women were taught how to develop a sustainable micro-business, and to make and sell DfG hygiene kits. A menstrual hygiene outreach programme for 1000 girls was conducted in each of the five districts in Nepal, with girls given training, a DfG hygiene kit, and the opportunity to become official ambassadors of menstrual hygiene in their communities.

>>> Cross-border trafficking is an extensive social problem in Nepal, perpetuated following the earthquakes of 2015. Local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Maiti Nepal was founded to protect Nepali women and girls from crimes such as domestic violence, trafficking, child prostitution, child labour and various forms of exploitation and torture. To date, the organisation has intercepted almost 40,000 women and girls at the borders of India and China, and more than 1,600 traffickers are now behind bars. 'Educate to Lead: Nepal' supported Maiti Nepal to invest in a transit house in the Kailali District, where 90 women directly benefited from room and board, counselling, income generation training and reintegration.

GEE Nepal

>>> Supporting the work of NGO, Roots for Life, founded by Soroptimist Carola Gosch, the SI Appeal is facilitating 3 projects, the first of which is rebuilding the Shree Sarawati L.S. School, in the village of Thade, South of Sagarmatha. The school, attended by 120 children from surrounding villages including Langtang and Rasuwa, is set in a steep mountain location and suffered terribly during the 2015 earthquake. The project included the rebuilding of 3 classrooms on the 1st floor, in addition to toilets and showers, and the project will offer education scholarships to girls.

WOMEN, WATER & LEADERSHIP

Welders, Malaysia

'Women, Water & Leadership' (WWL) is the vision of Soroptimist International (SI) President, Mariet Verhoef-Cohen 2017-2019, designed to respond to the global water crisis and relieve the disproportionate impact on the lives of women and girls across the world. Broadly focused on ensuring this human right is realised, WWL is delivering sustainable programmes to reduce inequalities and tackle discrimination, creating infrastructure for safe access to water, improved food security, and access to education. WWL implements Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5 and 6, working closely with women living in communities, designing programmes that move beyond the long-held stereotypes of women as 'victims' and 'beneficiaries', creating opportunities for women in water resource governance and in water-related professions.

>>> Sarawak and Sabah are situated on the island of Borneo, the third largest island in the world north of the Equator. Sarawak is known for its rugged, dense rainforest and Sabah is famed for its 4,095-metre-tall Mount Kinabalu. The indigenous people living in Malaysian Borneo face threats from climate change, deforestation, mining and continuous logging which is polluting the air and valuable sources of drinking water, threatening the rich biodiversity of the area. SI Damansara, already active working with women and girls in Sarawak and Sabah, proposed a progressive project to take place in both locations, with the vested interest of the villagers, helping to ensure sustainability. The Project provides a clean and safe

drinking water system and rainwater harvesting, the strengthening of an existing dam, the installation of pipes to feed water directly to the village, and water storage tanks for use in the dry season. Women and girls are trained in organic farming and maintenance of the systems, attaining positions of leadership in the community. Young women welders are upskilled to become welding inspectors, supporting SI's mission to educate and empower women and girls to move into leadership.

>>> Nakuru County, in the North-West of Kenya's capital Nairobi, is home to the Mwihoko Women Group, and a place where agriculture is the backbone of the county. Five-hundred women farmers are involved in a transformative programme, implementing the targets in SDGs, 4, 5 and 6, through an education and training programme, which generates opportunities for women and girls in leadership; creates sustainable food security through organic farming; facilitates access to water and clean energy; and through these activities, develops opportunities for economic growth. Women are educated in sustainable farming, and the women have attended a six-day residential farmer training course at Egerton Agricultural University, Nairobi, where they are empowered and educated in new farming techniques, entrepreneurship and finance. Working closely with the SI Union of Kenya, the Mwihoko Women Group play a pivotal role in the design through to implementation of the Project, and through the provision of new technologies, tools and clean energy, yields from an active organic crop covering 396 acres, have doubled. The women have shown leadership, ambition and commitment to the management of the project, ensuring increased economic opportunity and future sustainability.

>>> A major earthquake and tsunami hit the island of Sulawesi in September 2018, devastating the regional capital Palu and surrounding areas. Palu, home to

First harvest - Mwihoko Women's Project, Nakuru County, Kenya

350,000, was flattened by the tsunami, and the city and its surrounding areas faced a public health crisis through a lack of access to water and clean sanitation. Rembitan, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, is home to 250 families, with around 30 residing in the village of Rebuk Satu. Homes, water pipes, crafts, clothing and food materials used to generate income were damaged or destroyed. 'Recovery through Water, Shelter and Capacity Building: Rembitan, Lombok', is a sustainable WWL Project to support the village and disaster-affected women and children. The installation of a water and sanitation system includes toilet blocks with bathrooms, the upgrading of a well, washing centres, and the provision of training in water management and conservation, sanitation, hygiene, and waste and waste water management. The villagers have access to vocational training including weaving with natural dies,

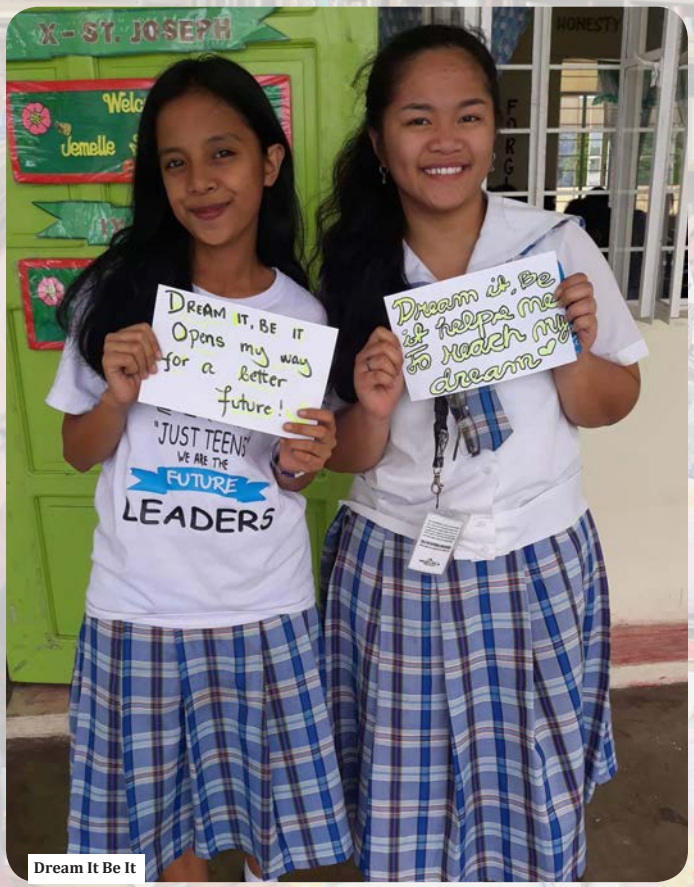
Learning about safe water and sanitation - WeWash, Bulgaria

batik, on-line selling and buying, and business mentoring and advice - empowering women and girls to create their own sustainable businesses and increase economic security for themselves and their families.

>>> 'WeWash' is designed to provide immediate water and sanitation to households within rural communities in Bulgaria, whilst empowering and mobilising women and girls to direct their own futures, know their rights, and to take on leadership and decision-making roles within their communities. Local Soroptimist Club Plovdiv, works closely with the Earth Forever Foundation, monitoring and evaluating the 'WeWash' Project throughout its lifecycle. There is vigorous development in the water and sanitation sector and due to Bulgaria's low compliance rates with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, together with limited capacity by the government to enforce the directive, those living in rural, dispersed communities need affordable alternatives to help meet regulations. In Stara Zagora, unemployed and retired women face multiple challenges and barriers to safe water and sanitation and to opportunities for education. 'WeWash' offers a mix of training programmes to empower women and girls and create career opportunities - leadership and coaching programmes; alternative sanitation planning; construction and management; and the reuse of treated water and biological waste for natural agriculture. All programmes empower women and girls and deliver new skills so they may implement and monitor alternative sanitation projects in their communities, progress in their careers, and have opportunities to run small-scale water and sanitation businesses.

SI of the Americas >>>

Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA) has 30,000 members in 21 countries and territories, improving the lives of women and girls through programmes leading to social and economic empowerment.



Dream It Be It

>>> Live Your Dream: Education and Training Awards for Women®

Grants totaling about $35 million have been awarded to over 30,000 women since 1972, through the SIA Live Your Dream: Education and Training Awards for Women. Increasing access to education, vocational skills and providing employment opportunities, the Live Your Dream Awards particularly focus on women in their struggle to overcome significant barriers in their lives, such as poverty, domestic violence, or drug and alcohol abuse. Presenting the opportunity to turn lives around, the Live Your Dream Awards build self-confidence, resilience—providing resources and solutions for women and supporting their ambitions to create positive change in their lives.

The Live Your Dream Awards empower and enable women such as Shamayel, born to human rights activists in Afghanistan, for whom, the award means freedom and opportunity. As a young girl Shamayel's parents defied the Taliban, sending Shamayel to an underground school—a move with tragic consequences—her father murdered and her mother dying upon learning of the devastating news. With her own life still in danger, Shamayel travelled to the U.S. leaving her six younger siblings behind. With the support of the Live Your Dream Awards, Shamayel now studies for a degree in international relations in the U.S, with her siblings now safe by her side. Shamayel says: "My overall goal is very clear. I want to work on behalf of justice, equality, and peace on earth for all."

>>> Dream It, Be It: Career Support for Girls®

Many young women face barriers to education and career progression, which include poverty, teen motherhood, or instability in their home lives. Dream It, Be It is designed to recognise such obstacles, and to provide girls of secondary school age with the information and resources they need to establish career goals. Working in partnership with girls in small groups and within conference settings, SIA clubs in 21 countries and territories provide direction, guidence, mentoring and resources for girls in a safe, empowering environment. The inspired programme includes career guidance and development—unlocking potential and supporting girls as they make choices for the future and take steps to realise their aspirations and dreams.

"I loved the whole idea of empowering us. They made us feel like no matter our background or situation, we can make it. We can become something successful." – Dream It, Be It participant

SI of Europe >>>

Soroptimist International of Europe is made up of 34,000 Soroptimists in 62 countries - with national Unions and Clubs initiating and implementing over 4,000 projects each year to Educate, Empower and Enable women and girls.

>>> Orange the world

The Union of Belgium turned its attention to Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the run up to the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign. Fifty-four Clubs within the Union combined skills and determination, to support the United Nations Secretary General's call to 'Orange the world'. Through partnerships to maximise voice, the Union promoted the campaign to local press and local authorities, increasing the global visibility of the Soroptimist movement in Belgium and the global challenge of VAWG.

An estimated 100,000 people witnessed the campaign messaging which included promotional banners and media coverage, even inspiring Brussels Town Hall to turn 'orange'. The Ghelamco Arena, in Ghent, Belgium, promoted the Union's message at its 20,000 multi-use stadium and a symposium was organised in Ghent, through a partnership between the Soroptimist Union of Belgium and Zonta International.

Images: Courtesy of Joelle Leder Photography

>>> Valgt det... A performance about human trafficking

Soroptimists from the Union of Norway launched a storytelling theatre, working with actresses Beathe Frostad and Astrid Elise Sæterøy, to inform, engage and create awareness about human trafficking. Ensuring that the delivery would prove accessible to young people, research was collated and interviews undertaken with law enforcement, rescue systems and most importantly, survivors. The stories gathered became the foundation for a performance work rooted in the real-life experiences of human trafficking survivors.

Affording a voice to survivors, the performance work is a platform for real stories – lived experiences, establishing a stepping-stone to national awareness and debate. The Soroptimist Union of Norway successfully marketed the premiere to young people and relevant organisations and thirty-seven performances were staged, with the initiative applauded and supported by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

Union of Norway - a storytelling theatre

>>> The sound of silence

Combatting domestic violence against women in Turkey is complex with progressive policy reforms coexisting with dominant conservative gender and family norms. Many women experiencing violence feel shame and social pressure, remaining silent, often living in unbearable conditions.

Members of SI of Içel Mersin, Turkey, co-ordinated an awareness campaign to inform the public about Violence Against Women, producing a short film with members filmed dressed in black, with black tape over their mouths, symbolising the silence of victims and the hidden nature of the crime. The film was released on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to generate and maximise impact.

>>> Creative arts to overcome barriers

Soroptimists of Köln-Römerturm, Germany, in collaboration with the Soroptimist Club of Köln, partnered with KUNSTHAUS KAT18, a progressive art space located in Cologne, complete with studios, gallery and coffee bar, that carries the message - Art can overcome barriers. Promoting artistic and cultural collaborations with the aim of improving the living conditions of artists with disabilities, the space runs regular projects, exhibitions, public discussions, readings and theatrical performances at its location. The Clubs collaborated to finance the completion of an apartment to be used by artists in residence, whilst they worked together with the studio community on a workshop and 6-week exhibition, resulting in the opportunity for the community to perform at the famous Museum Kolumba in Cologne. The exhibition was a success and is to be repeated at the Museum Kampa in Prague, Czech Republic, where Soroptimists from Prague will join the project.

Creative Arts overcoming barriers

SI of Great Britain & Ireland >>>

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has 8,000 Members in 350 Clubs in 28 countries who work at local, national and international level to Educate, Empower and Enable opportunities for women and girls.

Meru Women's Garden Project 2016 - 2019 >>>

A transformative project collaboration between Child.org, Community Initiative for Rural Development (CIFORD) and SIGBI is taking place in Meru County, Kenya, providing solutions to poverty, exclusion and discrimination, strengthening communities to support women and girls in transforming their own lives and the lives of others.

In the Meru District, Tigania East, 90% of the population live in rural areas, with HIV/AIDs prevalent in the region. Challenging perceptions and empowering women and girls to stand up for their rights, the Project is managed by CIFORD, led by Margaret Ikiara, a member of SI Meru, overseen by Child.org, and includes a variety of awareness and vocational educational programmes. Through a process of cascade learning and mentoring, the 'Meru Women's Garden Project' is increasing food production, through training in organic agriculture, and by providing the tools and resources required, women can become self-sufficient, reducing poverty and improving health and wellbeing. Creating breakfast clubs and sustainable food gardens, girls' attendance and achievement in secondary school is increased, and through workshops and mentoring, women and girls are informed on many relevant social issues, such as early marriage, HIV/AIDS, drugs and substance abuse and Female Genital Mutilation.

Meru Garden Project

Empowering Girls in Nepal 2019-2022 >>>

The incidence of reported rape within Nepal has quadrupled during the last decade, with over half of the victims minors. The work of ChoraChori, a UK registered charity, is focused on providing support to Nepal's child victims and their families and bringing the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. Founded in January 2015, the Charity is committed to empowering those at risk of sexual assault, rape, forced marriage and suicide. This involves providing education and vital skills training that can lead to good employment in a country where there are otherwise very few opportunities.

ChoraChori helps not only victims but also vulnerable girls who might drop out of school due to extreme family poverty. 'Empowering girls in Nepal' is an initiative selected as the SIGBI Federation Project for 2019 - 2022.

Through the programme, ChoraChori will be able to reach out to girls in the poorest Districts including Jhapa, Nepal's most south-eastern District, home to the tea plantations and the worst rates of sexual assault, rape and girl suicide of all Nepal's 75 Districts. The Federation support will allow the Charity to continue to develop training courses that began in 2018, including tailoring. At the end of a six-month course, graduates are given their own sewing machines as a final gift from ChoraChori.

Left Image: ChoraChori Right Images above and right: Seeed Jobs for Life

SI South West Pacific >>>

A Federation since 1978, Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific (SISWP) has grown from three member countries - Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, to 12, including Mongolia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Samoa, Singapore, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

SEEED Jobs for Life >>>

Crime, trafficking, prostitution and drug related offences have reached alarming levels in Malaysia. In 2015, Soroptimist International (SI) of Petaling Jaya competed with 300 NGOs in Malaysia to win the Berbudi Berganda: Social Impact Innovation Challenge, with a Government grant of RM25,000 and Overall Grand Prize money of RM30,000 from Credit Suisse Bank, sponsored by Agensi Inovasi Malaysia(AIM). SI of Southwest Pacific pioneered the project, creating a social impact innovation, youth transformation and job placement programme to be carried out over 10 weeks.

The course included Vision and Goal Setting, Communication Skills and Public Speaking, Critical Thinking and Project Management, together with resumé preparation, coaching for job interviews, business, financial and accountancy skills.

Aimed primarily at the 18-25 age group, SEEED Jobs for Life inspired young people to achieve mental, emotional and physical fitness, whilst building confidence and self-esteem and setting them on the road to empowering careers. Following graduation, the programme matched graduates with potential universities, or jobs that best fit their personality, goals and capabilities, including graduate Erwina Cynthia, who secured a JPA Scholarship (a fully aided Malaysian Government Scholarship) to study Medicine.

The programme has since expanded to include communities within Pandamaran and Kapar, and was awarded National Blue Ocean Strategy (Social PPP) status, and, through valuable sponsorship from Malaysian Collaborative Impact Initiative (MCII), and AIM / Prime Minister's Office, was able to carry out a transformational training programme in Klang during 2016.

Sanctuary - a safe shelter for women

Sanctuary: Shelter for Women >>>

The SISWP Federation Project for 2019-2021 provides support to victims of violence, and all those vulnerable during natural disasters, many who have no place to go and no one to turn to. Through the construction of three shelters in Fiji, a safe home is found - a place to heal, and a place to rebuild lives. The shelters empower women and children to find peace and security, away from perpetrators.

Through education, counselling and a programme of rehabilitation, the project works towards the elimination of all forms of violence, against women and girls. In September 2018, the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, together with the SISWP delegation, signed a Memorandum ofUnderstanding (MOU), officially launching the building of the shelters. A substantial donation towards the shelters came from TAPPOO Foundation, which leadFederation programme intends to establish a total of three centres, at a cost of $200,000 each, with all shelters in operation during 2019.

The Change We Want >>>

by Beverly Bucur, Soroptimist International Director of Advocacy

Assessing our work over the last quadrennium, Soroptimist International (SI) has celebrated many successes. We maintain a team of dedicated United Nations (UN) Representatives in 3 UN Centres: New York, Geneva and Vienna; and three specialized agencies: UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program), Nairobi; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Centre), Paris, and FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization) in Rome.

2018 saw the addition of a UN Representative in ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) bringing our UN team to 20. As one of 11 of the 134 organizations with General Consultative Status focusing on women and girls, we have an important role in advancing SDG 5 Gender Equality and Human Rights for Women and Girls. Our UN Representatives keep us informed on major issues and are our global voice at the UN. Because of this dedicated team, Soroptimist has an excellent reputation within the UN. We have been successful in reaching member states to influence the wording of the CSW Agreed Conclusions and we have collaborated with member states regarding the work of side events, raising the profile of SI.

As the UN celebrates it's 75th anniversary in 2020, what is its future and how will civil society be involved? Will we continue to have a voice in the UN? Civil Society must hold leaders accountable, promote human rights and monitor their governments' progress towards achieving sustainable development. In initial planning for the 75th anniversary celebration, civil society was left out. Member states have become vocal in expressing their displeasure in including civil society in the UN. We must not give up and must continue to work with member states - it is only by working together we can ensure that the goals of the 2030 Agenda are met.

During the last biennium we have also seen a troubling trend, the use of state sovereignty to roll back women's rights and restrict the voice of civil society. We have also seen the voices of human rights advocates and journalists who document human rights abuse silenced. Irish-based Front Line Defenders reported the murders of 321 human rights defenders in 27 counties in 2018, and the International Federation of Journalists reporting the deaths of 94 journalists and media workers in targeted killings, bomb attacks and crossfire incidents, in 2018.

What can we do about these and the other issues facing women and girls? We must continue to work with other like-minded Non-Governmental Organisations to speak out against injustice, however, advocacy begins at home. It is important for each Soroptimist to advocate at local and national levels as this is where change occurs.

A day in the life of a UN Representative, >>>

As a representative to the United Nations in New York since 2017, Vanesa Treers is one of the SI global UN team - dedicated to advocating on behalf of women and girls in the International arena. Vanesa gives us a snapshot of her life in motion.

Morning...

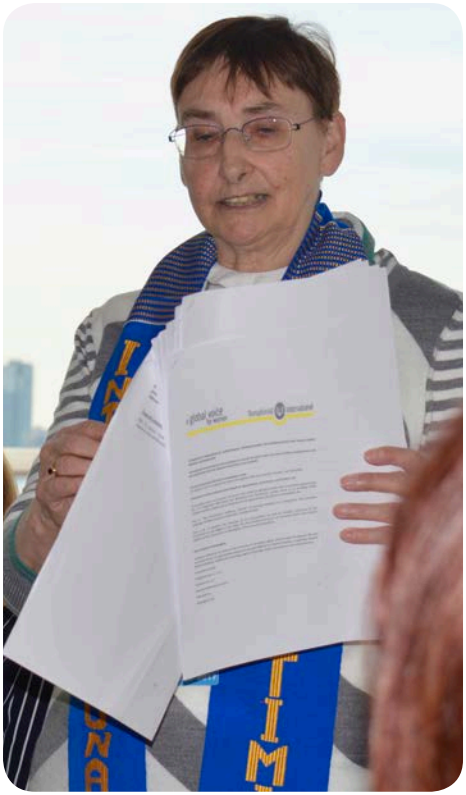
"An early start working on an article for the SI website and catching up on UN events at the Geneva Centre, thanks to UN Web TV! An interesting meeting at the Palais des Nations, Geneva looked at Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development, with interesting findings. A report showed that in a car crash, 47% of women are more likely to face serious injury, than male counterparts - with 17% suffering fatality, due to the car's design being developed, as standard, for a male's physique. Gender responsive development clearly imperative to health and safety.

Being based in New York, technology is vital so I can keep up to speed with the latest trends, topics and policies regarding gender equality, and on meetings taking place at UN centers around the globe.

Afternoon...

Having made my way to the UN Headquarters, New York, to attend the annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science Innovation and Technology at the ECOSOC chamber, I took notes on a session on Gender and Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the SDGs – good information to use in my reports back to SI and for use in blogs to ensure Soroptimists are up to date with developments. During networking I exchanged business cards and shared details, topics and themes of SI work. A project from the Pears Program for Global Innovation Organization in Israel demonstrated its work in education and innovation, and how women are being supported and facilitated to encourage the inclusion of women in STI. Exploring methods to attract and retain women in STI fields, the programme detailed ways to increase the participation of women in entrepreneurship, and the access of capital to empower.

Following the meeting, I had an appointment with other SI UN Representatives in midtown Manhattan to discuss and plan differing projects. Arriving early, I spent a little time preparing for an NGO Committee on the Status of Women meeting set up for the end of the week, where I hope to become part of the executive committee. As the youngest and most recent recruit to the SI United Nations Team in New York, I feel supported, and benefit from ongoing mentoring and expertise, I therefore believe I can achieve this role on the Committee. Every day as a UN Representative is different. Whether I am negotiating language in a document important to women and girls, on conference calls with SI HQ and the Director of Advocacy, writing reports, or visiting and speaking at meetings advocating on behalf of women and girls, there are many opportunities to engage and multiple channels of participation. Each day is packed with potential and I feel privileged and inspired to share the exceptional grassroots work of Soroptimists, and to be part of the SI UN team, whose presence and persistence ensures the voices of women and girls are heard.



Commission on the Status of Women >>>

by Pat Black

Almost as long as the United Nations (UN) has been in existence, Soroptimist International (SI) has recognised the contribution it could make on the global stage representing women and girls and supporting the move for gender equality.

Early recognition as a contributing Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and then achieving Consultative status, brings with it a responsibility for all Soroptimists to ensure that knowledge of our invaluable service and practical work at local level is conveyed to the major players at the UN: an evidence base for the need for change. The SI team of UN Representatives maintain this every day throughout the year ensuring that SI is represented and speaking at regular major events.

Annually this is exemplified at the major event for gender quality, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Over many years SI has played a major role in this event, presenting written and oral statements on the main theme outlining why change needs to take place, giving evidence from experience at grassroots level.

> 'I have been asked several times at CSW - why are we here? What are we doing to create or generate change? How does our contribution matter?'

These are exactly the questions I asked when I first started attending CSW many years ago. Thousands of women and a few men from civil societies around the world arrive in New York with great expectations, some for a week, some for a few days, some for the whole two weeks of discussions.

This is a huge event, having grown over recent years as Member States and civil society demonstrate what is being achieved and what still needs to change. From early on my personal interest became focussed into the second week of the meeting, particularly as I began to recognise the influence non-governmental organisations such as SI can have in persuading Member States to improve their agreement at the end of the meeting. The Agreed Conclusions give everyone an opportunity to express how women and girls can be defended, supported and recognised as equal members of all societies.

This means concentrating on a complex text on which Member States negotiate in the final stages during CSW. Once this document is, hopefully, agreed, NGOs and civil society have a benchmark which they can use in their home countries to advocate for policy and legislative change.

The discussions start many weeks before CSW meets in New York. The UN Secretary General produces

a report reviewing the position globally on the main theme under consideration for that year, usually in the December prior to CSW. By February a document known as the Zero Draft is published as a framework, to start discussions in and between Member States and UN Regions.

Soroptimists are involved with Governments as soon as the UN Secretariat issue the Zero Draft of Agreed Conclusions. SI issues recommendations via the SI Federations which Soroptimists can then present to their Governments. Of course, this is not always possible because there are some Governments which will not connect with or reach out to Civil Society and NGOs, however, there are enough who are willing to listen.

One of the actions Soroptimists can take in their countries is to work together with other like-minded NGOs, well in advance of the annual CSW meeting, so that they can try collectively to generate dialogue with the Ministers responsible for gender equality in their countries and the Member State delegates who will be attending.

This makes it so much easier to firstly, get recognition of the Soroptimist 'asks' at an early stage in the negotiations, and then to engage with that country and its delegation.

Several Soroptimists are now or have previously been NGO members of their country delegations: Iceland, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Austria for example, whilst others such as the United Kingdom and Canada are given good access to delegations and negotiators. This involvement not only assists in getting 'our message' across, but also encourages supportive Member States to stand strong when some countries are trying to reverse decisions made in the past.

Once CSW commences the negotiations begin in earnest. All Member States endeavour to promote the language they want to see included. In most cases reliance is on language that has previously been agreed at the UN, not always at CSW. This stress on language, whilst seeming pedantic, is very important, for example, the use of 'family', 'family unit' and 'families' can all be given different interpretations, particularly when translated into a language other than English.

SI tries each year to move things forward for women and girls. One example is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which has now advanced from an 'acceptable traditional cultural practice' to 'an unacceptable practice of violence against girls', with subsequent state legislation making this practice illegal on several grounds.

Each year the negotiations seem to become harder with supportive negotiators trying to hold the line for women and girls' rights against a growing number of Member States, including the United States of America, pushing back on those hard-won rights.

SI 'asks' each year have made it into the text, although in some cases perhaps not with language as strong as we would have liked. SI delegates are consulted regularly and frequently during the negotiations, and SI works quietly behind the scenes with other Member State negotiators, NGOs and UN Women.

We now need everyone to find out what is happening in their own country, to look at the Agreed Conclusions in relation to the work taking place on the Sustainable Development Goals. We must monitor and hold every country to account for all UN agreements and resolutions related to women and girls' rights.

Dealing with official statements and the wording of UN resolutions and agreements is not an area which is of interest to everyone, but it is important that we continue to make our SI voice heard at this level – after all we are a "Global Voice for Women".

Is Climate Change a She? >>>

by Mary Muia, SI UN Representative, Nairobi

Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing our planet and its people. Indisputable scientific evidence shows that global average temperatures are increasing due to greenhouse gases emitted by human activity. Climate change is also altering rainfall patterns and intensities around the world, increasing climate-related disaster frequencies and contributing to national and regional food and water insecurity crises, among other direct and indirect impacts.

Vulnerability and Impacts >>>

As girls and women suffer disproportionately from poverty, they will also suffer most when erratic weather brings droughts or floods to marginal lands or crowded urban areas where poverty is most felt. Women and children are 14 times more vulnerable than men in climate change-related natural disasters.

Adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to disasters as they begin to assume adult responsibilities and roles without the key skills and networks adults have. Moreover, adolescent girls are often overlooked and excluded from protection responses, which fail to address their unique vulnerabilities during climate disasters.

Women feel the negative effects of climate change in agriculture, a sector in which they represent 43 percent of the global workforce and 65 percent of those involved in raising livestock. Further impact is felt in health, nutrition, food security and production, migration and people's earnings.

Water insecurity during times of scarcity has a range of impacts on young women and girls, including in relation to household responsibilities, health, and education. The burden of water insecurity falls predominantly on young women and girls, who are largely responsible for sourcing water for household consumption. As climate change impacts worsen, young women and girls will likely need to travel even further to find sufficient quantities of water. This represents both a significant time and physical burden for women and girls, and the lack of water raises clear sexual and reproductive health concerns, particularly during menstruation and pregnancy.

Climate disasters have also been shown to increase gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual harassment and violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation of children, and human trafficking. Displacement and migration following a disaster can result in overcrowding and unsafe living conditions in evacuation centers, temporary housing, internal displacement camps, and other shelters. Girls and women become more vulnerable to harassment and violence, while increased poverty and loss of community likewise increase the propensity for violence.

Given many girls' and women's roles in agricultural production and as the procurers and consumers of water, cooking fuel, and other household resources, they are well suited to finding solutions to prevent further degradation and adapt to the changing climate. In fact, women have led – and continue to lead – many of the most innovative responses to environmental challenges all over the world.

Mary Muia, SI UN Representative, Nairobi

Climate Change Adaptation Strategies >>>

- Include girls and women in the creation of policies and strategies around environmental protection, including disaster response, building resilience, securing land and inheritance rights, combating food insecurity, and ending energy poverty;
- Participation of girls' women and indigenous grassroots groups in climate change mitigation and adaptation processes (negotiation and resource management);
- Advocate for a gender-responsive approach to climate financing;
- Integration of environmental conservation strategies within girls' and women's health programming and vice versa;
- Invest in technologies and initiatives to enhance sustainable and renewable energy sources that reflect girls' and women's knowledge, needs, and roles, while incorporating indigenous expertise and traditional practices;
- Invest in social safety support nets for young mothers and girls affected by migration.

Lets Keep On Moving Forward towards Equality, Development and Peace

>>>

by Dawn Marie Lemonds, participant in the NGO Forum September 1995

Not one of the 50,000 people at the opening ceremony of the 4th World Conference on Women (4WCW) in Beijing 1995, could ever forget the power of voices singing together at the largest event ever held on women's issues. The Beijing Declaration continues to be a "guiding document" articulating the 12 critical issues impacting women of the world. The parallel Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) conference, themed 'Look at the World through Women's Eyes' was attended by 45,000 women in the nearby city of Huairoa and presented over 2000 scheduled events in the 10-day period.

Over 100 Soroptimists participated in both the 4WCW and the NGO Forum - lead by then SI President, Patsy Daniels, SI Leaders and UN Representatives. Soroptimist leaders served as advisors to the Government delegations, particularly on Human Rights issues and Education. At the NGO Forum, Workshops were presented by Soroptimists on topics such as 'Women in Prisons', 'Women's Rights in Kenya' and various workshops on education. Ironically, the issue of Human Trafficking was hardly on anybody's minds in 1995 and only mentioned as an 'afterthought' in the Beijing Platform For Action (PFA) - although there were a few great workshops on the subject.

The two conferences focused on Poverty, and recognised that a lack of education, lack of paid employment and violence against women are key contributors to the issue. In 1995, there were few women elected leaders in power, great disparity in all services for women, and many countries had prohibitions against women owning property or even making decisions for their children. Technology was revealed in 1995 as something that would positively impact the world and microcredit loans were being given to women to remediate poverty. I attended over 50 workshops and programmes, including an 8 hour tribune on 'Violence Against Women', a workshop on 'Muslim Women's Experience of Violence', an amazing play from the Philippines on human trafficking, and I soothed my soul at a singing workshop with a gospel group from Washington DC. My life was forever changed.

Fast Forward to Beijing + 25. The world is now focused on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since 1995, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) annually addresses the progression toward areas of the PFA and the SDGs related to gender. What is better- what is worse now? It is affirming that due to constant and persistent NGO presence, gender is now being addressed. Much to the surprise of many, UN Women was formed in 2010, giving women a seat at the BIG UN Table.

Poverty reigns as a predominant issue, human trafficking has gained a front seat of concern, climate change, overpopulation, food security and violence in society are also gaining recognition as key issues affecting women. There has been some progress made for women in education, a slight increase in elected women leaders, and some economic advances. Yet, there is much to do.

We, as Soroptimists and as citizens of the world must continue our own work and partner with like-minded organisations through advocacy and service. We must "keep on moving forward, never turning back, never turning back" (Reference Holly Near song, sung at the Opening Ceremony).

In the Spotlight
SDG4 & the 2030 Agenda >>>

The importance and value of SDG 4 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', strikes

to the heart of SI's mission and many SI projects use education and vocational skills training as a critical cross-cutting mechanism to unlock the potential of women and girls.

Education helps break the cycle of poverty: educated women are less likely to marry early and against their will; less likely to die in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; and are more likely to send their children to school. Tackling adult illiteracy and promoting employable skills, and facilitating women's inclusion in sustainable economies, will empower them within their communities and ensure better outcomes for women and their families. By educating, empowering and enabling women and girls, SI understands education as both an intrinsic right and a critical lever to reaching development objectives.

However, poverty and economic disenfranchisement are not the only outcomes of a lack of education, they are also significant factors in preventing access to education for women and girls. Policies and actions taken to improve this access must address economic barriers to education at all levels. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, child labour, child marriage, inadequate sanitation and violence in schools, all create environments that prevent women and girls from achieving their fullest potential. As well as structural challenges, there can be individualised barriers to education such as school fees, safe transportation and uniform costs, early pregnancy, or being kept home to work in a family business. From evidence gathered through SI projects, investing in girls' and women's education and skills training, needs to be seen as equally important as investing in the education of men and boys, policies and actions must directly tackle situations that contribute to unequal outcomes.

Commitments on gender equality are not new, but the agreement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015 marked a global agreement that gender is a cross-cutting development issue, and that gender mainstreaming is a means critical policy measure and means of implementation for countries who want to achieve their full development potential. For SDG4 to be achieved, there must be gender equal access to education. Women and girls need to be agents and participants, not just recipients, of sustainable development if the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved. The SDGs are agreed to be interconnected and indivisible, hence SI works to implement all 17 SDGs and targets. It is impossible to address one goal without addressing others - gender equality cuts across all of the SDGs, and gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting are essential measures to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Education remains one of many sectors where there must be increased political will to make the changes needed so that no one is left behind.

Deborah Thomas, SI Global Executive Director >>>

During the closing months of the last quadrennium 2011 – 2015, my message to Soroptimists was "Let's do it. Let no stone remain unturned when a woman or girl needs our help".

During this quadrennium we have certainly helped many women and girls through our International President Appeals: Educate to Lead: Nepal and Women, Water & Leadership. We have provided access to education in many different forms, helped to rebuild spaces for education, trained women farmers, women engineers and equipped women with knowledge to manage their water resources which can severely constrain a woman or girls' ability to go to school or work.

Soroptimist International's advocacy work has continued to grow, expanding our United Nations team. Our ability to work at local, regional, national and international levels, sharing information and best practice, showcasing how we implement the Sustainable Development Goals, provides a knowledge based, global platform from which we can advocate for women and girls.

As we approach the end of the 2015 – 2019 quadrennium and make plans for the 100th anniversary of our wonderful organisation, "let us all carry on turning those stones, for as long as it takes and as many times as it takes" to ensure Soroptimist International is known and recognised for all that it does, and will continue to do, for women and girls worldwide.

Sharon Fisher, SI President Elect >>>

The value of any social movement is having everyone moving in the same direction toward common goals. The stories, such as those in this resource, can share our collective impact across the globe and join us with those that are inspired to learn and support our mission. We can be the messenger that brings the complex global issues into focus and aligns them with the programme work of SI, our Federations and Clubs.

We all share the dream for Soroptimist's to be a voice for gender equality and human rights as we transform the lives of women and girls. When we empower women and girls we realise a better future for all. I believe we are stronger together. Working in harmony at all levels will strengthen clubs, Federations and Soroptimist International, to meet the challenges we face.

Thank you to everyone who supported Educate to Lead: Nepal, of which I was Chair from 2015-2017. In 2021 we will begin the next 100 years of working together to transform the lives of women and girls. The world is changing and change creates opportunities and we must be proud of our accomplishments so far. I am excited to engage in the new possibilities with you in my role as President of Soroptimist International for the biennium 2020-2021.

About SI

Founded in 1921, SI (Soroptimist International) Limited is registered in England and Wales with Companies House, company number 08670477 and has four members: the Federation of Soroptimist International of the Americas; the Federation of Soroptimist International of Europe; the Federation of Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland; and, the Federation of Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific. With almost 75,000 volunteers, working to transform the lives of women, girls and communities in 122 countries, SI holds General Consultative Status since 1984 with The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and advocates for human rights and gender equality across United Nations Centres. The international organisation's United Nations Representatives ensure that the voices of women and girls around the world are included in international decision making and are each involved with numerous committees.

The international head office is based in Cambridge, United Kingdom, and the four Soroptimist International Federations operate from Philadelphia, USA; Geneva, Switzerland; Stockport, UK; and Sydney, Australia, with a Board formed of two Directors from each Member Federation, together with the International President, International Treasurer and International Director of Advocacy, each appointed as a Director of the company.

Soroptimist International HQ

8a Romsey Terrace
Cambridge CB1 3NH, UK
hq@soroptimistinternational.org
soroptimistinternational.org

SI of the Americas

1709 Spruce Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA
siahq@soroptimist.org
soroptimist.org

SI of Europe

Route de Florissant 72
CH-1206 Geneva, Switzerland
siehq@soroptimisteurope.org
soroptimisteurope.org

SI Great Britain and Ireland

2nd Floor, Beckwith House
1-3 Wellington Road North
Stockport SK4 1AF, UK
hq@sigbi.org
sigbi.org

SI of the South West Pacific

PO Box 746
Surry Hills
NSW 2010, Australia
hq@siswp.org
siswp.org

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS >>> ARGENTINA BOLIVIA BRAZIL CANADA CHILE COLUMBIA EQUADOR GUAM JAPAN SOUTH KOREA MEXICO NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS PALAU PANAMA PARAGUAY PERU PHILIPPINES PUERTO RICO TAIWAN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA VENEZUELA

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF EUROPE >>> ALBANIA ARMENIA AUSTRIA BELGIUM BENIN BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA BULGARIA BURKINA FASO CROATIA CYPRUS CZECHIA DENMARK DUBAI EGYPT ESTONIA ETHIOPIA FINLAND FRANCE MACEDONIA (FYROM) GEORGIA GERMANY GHANA GREECE GUINEA HAITI HUNGARY ICELAND ISRAEL ITALY IVORY COAST KENYA KOSOVO KUWAIT LATVIA LIECHTENSTEIN LITHUANIA LUXEMBOURG MADAGASCAR MALI MOLDOVA MONOCO MOROCCO NETHERLANDS NORWAY POLAND PORTUGAL ROMANIA RUSSIA RWANDA SAN MARINO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC SENEGAL SERBIA SLOVAKIA SLOVENIA SPAIN SWEDEN SWITZERLAND TOGO TUNISIA TURKEY UKRAINE

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND >>> ANGUILLA BANGLADESH BARBADOS CAMEROON GAMBIA GRENADA GUERNSEY INDIA ISLE OF MAN JAMAICA JERSEY MALAWI MALTA MAURITIUS NEPAL NIGERIA PAKISTAN REPUBLIC OF IRELAND SEYCHELLES SIERRA LEONE SOUTH AFRICA SRI LANKA ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES TANZANIA TRINIDAD & TOBAGO TURKS & CAICOS UGANDA UNITED KINGDOM ZIMBABWE

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC >>> AUSTRALIA CAMBODIA FIJI HONG KONG SAR INDEPENDENT STATE OF SAMOA INDONESIA KINGDOM OF THAILAND MALAYSIA MONGOLIA NEW ZEALAND PAPUA NEW GUINEA REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE