Where We Stand Statement: Food Security

Position Summary:

- Climate change, conflict, and economic insecurity are among several drivers of food insecurity, of which the world is now facing a global hunger crisis;
- Gender inequality plays a role in food production and consumption, including women and girls' limited access to land rights;
- Food insecurity impacts women and girls in different ways to men and boys – including heightened risk of exploitation and long-term health risks;
- All women and girls must be educated, empowered and enabled as leaders and decision makers in global food policies and strategies to ensure their specific needs are met.

Where Things Stand:

Defined at the 1996 World Food Summit, being 'food secure' is "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".

The world is in a crippling and escalating hunger crisis. According to the 2023 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, between 691 and 783 million people faced hunger in 2022, an increase of 122 million people compared to 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these already staggering figures, the global situation worsened further in 2023, with at least 345 million people across 82 countries at risk of acute food insecurity, and 50 million people on the brink of famine. The African continent remains the worst-affected region with one in five people facing hunger on the continent, more than twice the global average.

Food security is compromised or threatened by many factors, one of which is climate change. Higher global temperatures and more extreme weather events associated with climate change are reducing the reliability of food production. Armed conflict, population growth, inadequate water supplies, overharvesting of plants, fish, and wildlife, and land grabbing are other factors significantly impacting food security

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globally. Compromised food production is also contributing to rising food costs worldwide.

Access to and control over productive resources, such as land, water, livestock, and seed, is a key contributor to food security. Yet women's role in farming, particularly in the lowest income countries, continues to be overlooked. Women are denied access to financial support, land ownership and decision making, which hampers their ability to raise productivity levels on their farms. Indeed globally, only 15 per cent of landholders are women, yet women constitute approximately 43 per cent of the global agricultural labour force. Many female agricultural workers face inequalities in access to agricultural technologies like biological innovations, machinery, as well as transport, storage and market infrastructure. The World Food Programme estimates that if women farmers had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields by 20 to 30 per cent, lifting 100 million to 150 million people out of hunger.

On the other hand, gendered patterns of food consumption negatively affect girls' and women's nutrition, despite their physiological need for more nutrient rich food, especially in pregnancy. Not only are women and girls at higher risk of malnutrition, but malnutrition poses specific threats to adolescent girls and women who are pregnant and breastfeeding, as it increases their risk of miscarriage and maternal mortality, as well as the risks of stillbirth, newborn deaths, low birth weight and stunting for their children, leading to an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. According to Plan International, maternal undernutrition contributes to an estimated 2.4 million neonatal deaths every year.

In addition, food insecurity increases women and girls' vulnerability, putting them at ever-greater risks of experiencing gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation during their efforts to secure food and earn an income. Education becomes less of a priority for many families who are forced to focus on their basic survival. Early and child marriage is closely linked to the impacts of food insecurity and is proven to have detrimental outcomes on girls' long-term health, wellbeing and potential as economic contributors later in life, as many never return to school to complete their education.

Where things need to go...

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Responses to the global hunger crisis must take account of individuals' diverse experiences of food insecurity, and in particular the ways in which they are shaped by entrenched gender inequalities. Women must be empowered and enabled as decision makers in the food and agriculture industries. Failure to do so will mean that the specific needs of all women and girls risk being neglected.

Fundamental Actions:

Soroptimist International recognises that the right to food is inextricably interconnected with other basic human rights and the achievement of gender equality. Soroptimist International therefore urges governments to examine and implement strategies to overcome obstacles to fulfil of the right to food for all, including women and girls. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, the private sector (including businesses), and other institutions and individuals who interact with women and girls must act immediately to address and improve food security and tackle the global hunger crisis.

Soroptimist International calls upon:

- Governments, the private sector, and NGOs should provide effective and sustainable solutions to food insecurity and strategies to remove impediments and violations of the human right to food. The challenges, concerns and interests of the women and children should be addressed to inform food security policy;

- Governments and all stakeholders must empower all women and girls to be leaders, experts, and agents of change in food production, distribution and consumption by enabling them as decision makers at the local, national, and international levels;

- Governments, the private sector (including businesses), and NGOs to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of all women and girls, by granting their right to inherit and own land in rural and urban areas;

- Governments should adopt a legal and institutional framework to assist those within its jurisdiction to ensure their food security, including water rights, land

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rights, transportation systems, and food storage and distribution systems;

- Governments should enact laws and policies that protect the human rights of the most vulnerable populations, including women, children, older persons, and persons living with disabilities, which in turn address issues of food inequality and discrimination, to promote inclusive food access for all citizens;

- Governments should fulfill their legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement to prevent global temperatures from rising, and compromising a vast range of human rights, including the rights to food, safe water, and land; and

- The role of all women, including indigenous knowledge in food systems, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation must be fully supported at all levels.

Additional Actions:

- **Raise awareness of the causes and consequences of food insecurity:** Obstacles to the realisation of the right to food must be identified at an appropriate political boundary or regional scale, and then mitigative measures identified, evaluated, selected, and implemented. The costs of undernourishment and hunger to communities, individuals, households, and society must be recognised.

- **Provide training and capacity-building to vulnerable women and girls:** Training programmes and capacity-building targeting women and girls and supporting their roles in improving food security should give women and girls an awareness of good nutrition and resilience, which in turn gives women and girls the power to recognise and choose options that improve their own situations and increase their ability to reduce household poverty. In addition, programmes for agro-ecological transition in food systems that acknowledge and improve the role of women in all aspects of the supply chain must be funded.

- **Provide quality, inclusive, accessible education and access to decent work:** Quality educational programs throughout the life course should equip all women

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and girls with the skills necessary to enter into decent work opportunities. Women and girls should also be empowered and enabled to take leadership roles within their communities and become equal partners with men.

- **Conduct research and monitoring; collect, and use disaggregated data:** Data collection systems to collect accurate and reliable qualitative and quantitative data that are disaggregated by gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, language, marital status, place – and other descriptors that are relevant to monitoring inequalities experienced by women and girls – must be developed and uniformly implemented to assist development and implementation of food system policies and when designing, monitoring, and evaluating projects that provide aid and services to all women and girls.

Where Soroptimist International Stands:

Soroptimist International views gender equality as a determinant of food security and recognises the unique challenges that women and girls face around th eworld, now at unprecedented rates. Soroptimist International's principles to 'educate, empower, and enable' all women and girls form the bedrock of its advocacy including on the critical issue of food security.

Soroptimist International supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through its Federations, Unions, Regions, Clubs, by working on the ground with partner organisations and UN agencies to Educate, Empower and Enable all women and girls everywhere.

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