

SI Where We Stand Statement Access to Education

Soroptimist International recognises that access to education for girls and women at all ages is a fundamental human right and is vital for development, economic growth, and poverty reduction. Much progress has been made in improving girls' enrolment in primary schools. However, we still live in a world where many girls and young women face insurmountable barriers in completing their education, where educational outcomes for girls and young women are often lacking, and where many mature women lack basic skills in reading and writing or access to continuing education opportunities. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, economic and time poverty, and violence at schools, amongst others, all create environments which keep girls and women from achieving their fullest potential.

Soroptimist International urges governments of all countries to:

- Fulfil existing obligations in international treaties and agreements relating to equal access to education;
- Prioritise quality education 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;
- 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 facilities, and ensure that domestic policies and justice systems are designed to protect women and girls in educational 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;
- Work with local partners to improve facilities so that women and girls are afforded education that is accessible, acceptable, available, and of good quality;
- Collect sex-disaggregated data on enrolment, retention, and completion, as well as sex-disaggregated data on educational outcomes to ensure that women and girls are afforded quality education.

Soroptimist International will continue to:

- Raise awareness specifically about the importance of education for women and girls;
- Provide scholarships and funding for those most in need of primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling;
- Create or ensure girl-friendly physical environments in schools, such as proper sanitation facilities, clean water in schools, safe transport to and from school, provision of school supplies, and provision of school meals;
- Provide non-formal educational opportunities for girls and young women to assist in the transition from school to work or adulthood;
- Equip young women with the vocational skills and tools necessary to secure stable employment;
- Implement 'second chance' programmes providing education and training for mature women;
- Train female teachers to achieve gender equity in teaching staff;
- Develop and implement programmes which increase access to educational opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and maths for women and girls, and opportunities in traditionally-female dominated fields such as nursing and teaching for men and boys;
- Run projects which work to ensure seamless access to formal education for girls and young women, particularly in the face of natural disasters, conflict, and forced migration.

Soroptimist International:

- **Educates** women, girls, men, and boys about the importance of access to education for girls and women, whilst assisting in the direct provision of formal and non-formal educational opportunities for women and girls;
- **Empowers** women and girls with increased access to the skills and the confidence needed to achieve their fullest potential;
- **Enables** women and girls to meaningfully utilise their education by working to change attitudes, behaviours, and social structures in the larger community that act as barriers rooted in gender inequalities.