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## A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAMME TEAM!

*“Soroptimists will improve the lives of Women and Children through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities.”* This is Goal 1 of our Strategic Plan and the ultimate reason why we chose to focus the first Programme News of the year on ‘Educate to Lead’. Education is *the* most efficient weapon for combatting poverty and improving women’s living conditions. Soroptimists know that well! Last year, Clubs across our Federation reported more than 600 education projects for which they raised nearly €1.9 million. Those projects benefited some 26,000 women and children across Europe and Africa. Many Clubs have also been very active in their mentoring programmes – another wise way of building skills and empowering women and girls. As an indication, 1,094 mentees completed such programmes last year. But the magic our members play in their Clubs and the wealth of ideas they have is not known enough. In our Programme News, we want to spread the word about the wonderful work you are doing! We hope you will find the content inspiring. If you do, please circulate the Programme News widely to your Club members and friends. Don’t be shy, be proud. We certainly are!

Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis\* – President Elect and head ‘Programme & Advocacy’  
Emine Erdem – Assistant Programme Director

\*currently acting Programme Director in lieu of Christine Peer, on duty leave for personal reasons

## This month we talk about: EDUCATION

### EDUCATION — A RIGHT, FOR ALL

The nice thing about the theme of Education is that it gives us the opportunity to exercise our imagination to its maximum since any action or experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Thus almost every project Soroptimists undertake can be considered under the theme of education. A study conducted by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning indicates that stronger capacities in educational planning and management may have an important spill-over effect on the system as a whole. (de Grauwe, A. 2009. *Without capacity, there is no development*. Paris: UNESCO-IIPE).

When we think of education, we tend to associate the term with **formal education**, be it primary, secondary or tertiary. We immediately think of schools ranging from buildings to classrooms and from stationery equipment to teachers. There are in fact many examples of Soroptimist actions in this realm of education and we should be proud of the progress achieved. But we should also be aware that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are 73 million children – mostly female children in poor families – who have not started elementary school. There are more than 200 million children – mostly girls from poor families – who have not attended secondary school. It is because of these figures that the UN has declared Universal Primary Education as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

There is, furthermore, **informal education** (officially recognised as such by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD) for which there will not be a graduation ceremony and most of the time not even a diploma or a certificate. Yet informal education is another very important aspect of our actions and programmes. In these times of economic crisis there are many opportunities for informal educational projects which in turn can become the steering wheel for new economic enterprises. Informal learning occurs in a variety of places and through daily interactions, situation management, and fitness for life. For many learners this includes language acquisition which is a perfect project at a time of globalisation and of global migrations. Informal education also nicely responds to President Ulla Madsen’s Biennium theme, *Let’s Go Green*. There are many ways we, as Soroptimists, can educate the world to respect the environment, to eliminate waste, and to wisely use what the planet offers us.

This is indeed a new approach to education which can no longer only concentrate on building the consciousness of society but has the obligation to re-invent itself to answer to the many challenges of this century and beyond. In 1966, through article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN recognised the right of everyone to an education and in 2011 Soroptimists from all over the world, responding to a questionnaire prepared by the SI Programme Team declared Education our own Long Term Theme.

- Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis



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## 35,000 SOROPTIMISTS WORKING FOR THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN & GIRLS!

*Some highlights of recent projects conducted by Soroptimists across Europe and Africa!*

### Sending Girls to School

The Soroptimist Club of Aalst in Belgium partnered with Plan Belgium and the Government of Nigeria to support the education of girls in Nigeria. Because of social norms and the weight of tradition in the most remote parts of the country, girls face different pressures (forced marriages, domestic work, etc.) that end up excluding them from education or even forcing them to drop out of school. The goal of the project was to put emphasis on the importance of investing in girls' education. The project also involved radio campaigns that encourage parents to send their girls to school by making them aware that education is the most effective way to reduce poverty and that it is the entry point to other possibilities.

### Investing in Girls' Education

Romanian Soroptimists from Targoviste launched an initiative called "EMMA - Education goals, Moving to leadership skills, Material help also given, Amazing results for women and girls" to support school children by providing school supplies and financial support for girls. The lack of financial resources means many parents in Romania have difficulties paying for their children's books, meals or bus tickets. This has a damaging effect on children's education as it increases absenteeism and drop out rates. Project EMMA sought to contribute to the alleviation of this problem.



### Educating Migrant Women

The Club of Livorno in Italy launched a project to facilitate the socio-economic integration of immigrant women by promoting literacy and delivering Italian language lessons. Immigrant women everywhere face particular challenges in gaining access to employment, especially when they are not able to use their native

language. To help alleviate this problem in Italy, Soroptimists from Livorno gathered human and material resources to participate in the education and empowerment of immigrant women coming mainly from Ukraine and Moldova, but also from Latin America and Morocco.

### Building and Improving Schools

The Club Bamako Espoir in Mali implemented the construction of 3 classrooms and 3 toilets in the village of Fourra in Mali. Previously the children of Fourra had to walk 8km twice a day to go to and from school from the neighbouring village. Thanks to this project they are less



tired and can study in better conditions. Interestingly, this project is also aligned with President Ulla's Biennium theme as it introduces solar panels instead of kerosene lamps into the school thus contributing to sustainable development. The panels are also used by women during their evening literacy sessions. Furthermore, the school now has safe drinking water and sanitation facilities which improve hygiene and reduce disease incidence among the children. This impressive project was supported by several Clubs from the Swiss Union (SI Burgdorf, Langenthal, and Bad Ragaz).

### Educating for Leadership

The Club Hafnarfjordur og Gardabaer within the Union of Iceland led an education and leadership project that consisted in holding seminars of reflexion in three colleges. The seminar was based on a coaching methodology in which each participant is encouraged to discover their own strengths and learn ways to express them with confidence. The goal of the seminars was to help young women and girls become more qualified leaders in their own life, to help them overcome poor self-esteem and lack of confidence. The 60 participants left great feedback – "Now I really know what I want to do in my life!", said one participant.

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## GENERAL PROGRAMME NEWS

### BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2014

The deadline to submit your Club's or your Union's project for the Best Practice Awards 2014 is just around the corner! **Don't miss the chance to submit your fantastic work!**

This year we are giving out **11 awards**: one **Project of the Year Award** and two Awards for each Programme Objective: **Education, Economic Empowerment, Violence Against of Women and Children, Health, and Sustainable Development & Environment**. Each Club and each Union can submit two projects within each of these categories.

Awarded projects will be promoted in the Programme News, in *The Link*, on the SIE website, and, of course, in the Best Practices 2014 brochure! Winners will be announced at the Governors' Meeting in Copenhagen in July.

### BEST PRACTICES 2014

**Important!** To make the submission process easier for you we have developed a new, simpler Entry Form for submitting your project. Please write to us at [programme@soroptimisteurope.org](mailto:programme@soroptimisteurope.org) if, for whatever reason, you haven't received the Entry Form.

**Also!** We are this year giving you the option to submit your projects in languages other than English and French! Please feel free to submit your form in: German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Spanish, or Turkish – languages that are understood by the Programme and Advocacy Team.

**All submissions must be in by February 28th.** We are looking forward to hearing from many of you!

### PROGRAMME AND ADVOCACY TRAINING SEMINAR IN GENEVA

Soroptimist International of Europe Headquarters in Geneva will soon be hosting a **brand new 2-day Programme and Advocacy Training Seminar for SIE Programme Directors!**

Together we will go over the tools all Unions and Clubs have at their disposal to be effective in running the Programme side of things, in other words, to imagine, plan and execute impactful

projects. We will seek to foster a fruitful and structured exchange of 'what works and what doesn't' – an exchange that we hope will last well beyond the Training Seminar itself. The Advocacy part will introduce Programme Directors to the concept of advocacy at the local and international levels and will include 'the real deal' – a session at the United Nations in Geneva!

We will, of course, also make sure all participants have plenty of opportunity for networking and for sharing ideas and experiences.

The Training Seminar will be open to all Union Programme Directors as well as Single Club Programme Directors invited on a rotational basis (similar to that of the Governors' Meeting). The Training Seminar will take place in Geneva during the second half of May.

Stay tuned for more news very soon – an email will be going out shortly to all Unions and Single Clubs!

### PROJECT REPORTING (PFR)

The SIE Reporting system will be ready shortly!

The Programme and Advocacy Team is finalising the development of a form and database that will address your concerns expressed in recent months.

As you will see, we have not sought to completely redesign the PFR form. We have kept what works and improved on the elements that members consistently found lacking or confusing. Our goal was to make the form simpler, clearer, and easier to use.

The new PFR form will also give you the possibility to submit your project reports in a number of languages other than English.

In the future, all your projects will be included in the member area of the SIE Website. You will have the opportunity to fill out and edit them in the 'My Club' and 'My Union' sections.

In the coming two weeks we shall be running tests. We will be asking some Programme Directors to help us in this task – to test, comment, and help improve the new Project Reporting system. We look forward to launching it later next month!



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## PROJECT MATCHING

What better way to support projects far away from home than through Project Matching! The website is updated regularly with new projects seeking support so please let us know if you would like to have your project added. And if you've already supported a project or are engaged in partnerships with other Clubs, please make sure we have your news!



SOROPTIMIST  
PROJECT MATCHING

In this issue, we would like to feature two amazing education projects seeking your support:

### **KENYA, SI Kisumu Winam, Vocational Training for Girls, KE0006**

This project aims to provide vocational training and micro-business skills for girls of the Rachuonyo District in Kenya to help them escape poverty and become self-sufficient. It will train girls on tailoring and dressmaking for a year. Upon graduation they will undergo external tests conducted by the Kenyan government which will in turn give them access to the job market.

The budget needed for this project is **EUR 7'982** and the Club is still seeking funding.

<http://soroptimistprojects.org/projects/ke0006-vocational-training-for-the-girl-child>

### **NIGER, SI Ténééré Niamey, Construction of Toilets for Gamkalley 1 Kindergarten, NG0003**

This project seeks to build toilets in Gamkalley 1 Kindergarten and to educate the public about healthy and efficient personal hygiene habits. As the kindergarten has no sanitation infrastructure, children and teachers have no option but to relieve themselves in the yard or around the kindergarten, which threatens their health and the hygiene of the school. The purpose of the project is to build toilets for the kindergarten's children and teachers. Training will be given to the children on the use of the toilets, as well as on hand washing and other important personal hygiene habits.

The budget needed for this project is **EUR 3'780** and the Club is still seeking funding.

<http://soroptimistprojects.org/projects/ng0003-construction-of-toilets-for-the-gamkalley-1-kindergarten>

## EDUCATION & PRESIDENT ULLA'S THEME

President Ulla's theme *Let's Go Green* seeks to encourage all Soroptimists to integrate an environmental approach into their projects. Indeed, the Biennium theme asks all Soroptimist Clubs and members to make sustainability and environmental protection not only a priority for their Soroptimist projects but their personal responsibility. In this respect, the theme of environment must be thought about consciously which makes the importance of environmental education paramount. Our fragile planet is facing an emergency. Education about the environment has never been more important. Education should give everyone the keys and skills to actively contribute to building a sustainable world. Education should make all of us – children, teenagers, adults – responsible citizens who are aware of environmental and sustainable development issues.

Education on the environment must allow everyone to discover that our actions and behaviours can have positive or negative effects on the physical and human environment. It is by promoting the awareness of individual responsibility that education will help us gain respect for the environment. Priority areas of focus include:

- Encouraging ownership within sustainable development, through awareness raising and information dissemination to the public on key issues such as climate change, disaster prevention, biodiversity, poverty reduction, sustainable consumption, etc.
- Encouraging behavioural changes at all ages and in all aspects of personal and professional life.
- Encouraging the emergence of individual and collective practices to protect the environment that are adapted to local specificities.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/special-themes/science-education/environment/>  
<http://www.unep.org/training/>





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## COUNTRY FOCUS: RWANDA!

Rwanda represents an exceptionally active Soroptimist Union in Africa which is why we have chosen to feature it in our new "Country Focus"!

The Union of Rwanda has active members in the Clubs of **Kigali, Etoile de Kigali, Kibungo, Butare, Gisenyi and Ruhengeri**. And that's not all! Two new Clubs were chartered on December 7-8, 2013! The Clubs of **Rwamagana** and **Muhanga** were opened with great ceremony in the presence of **SIE President Ulla Madsen, SIE Vice President Extension Françoise Murebwayire, SIE Executive Director Anne Simon, and SIE Peace Prize Winner 2013 Judge Silvana Arbia**.

The Union of Rwanda has more than 100 members working with commitment and dedication to improve the lives of women and children in their country. Here are some examples of the excellent education projects they have been working on:

Helping women build their social, professional, and economic independence, the educational centre of



**San Marco**, which started as an initiative of **Bettina Scholl-Sabatini together with Soroptimists from Luxembourg and Kigali**, has been operating since 2004. Over the years, the San Marco Centre has received the generous support of numerous Clubs, including **SI Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Norway** – to name only a few. The centre, which is entirely self-financed, offers education for children between the ages of 3 to 16 as well as vocational training such as sewing and computer classes. Nearly 100 children and teenagers attend the SI primary school. Within this impressive centre, the **Clubs of Kigali and San Marino** have also created a particularly successful cooperation model offering young women various classes in crafts including high quality jewellery making – merging traditional techniques with state of the art design. The jewellery made at the centre is sold not only in Rwanda but exhibited in art centres and fairs in Italy – with all the money returning directly to the artisans! This project is a true example of women's economic empowerment: women work and manage their own cooperative and teach other women their skills!

Using the San Marco facilities, **Italian Soroptimists** organised eight 3-day training sessions for more than 300 Rwandan women and men from across the country. Participants learned about discrimination against women in the sphere of land tenure and about family law, inheritance law, and property law. They are now all able to advise women in rural areas about their legal rights on land tenure.

**Judge Silvana Arbia**, visiting the San Marco Centre on the occasion of the chartering of the new Clubs, was so impressed by these projects and the Rwandese Soroptimists' dedication to education that she decided to support them! She is considering donating part of her SIE Peace Prize to finance a class at the Centre. Furthermore, she shared with the Rwandese members her idea to replicate the concept in other countries of the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Tanzania etc.) which would expand the transfer of knowhow and extend the reach of the project beyond the borders of Rwanda. As former Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and as a passionate supporter of peace, she believes that the combination of education and women's determination can help stabilise the region.

Finally, we highlight a very creative Rwandese education project that is helping orphans. The 1994 Genocide left many pregnant mothers single and many children without parents. Sadly, many of the orphanages are now closing, leaving children by themselves. **Rwandese Soroptimists** decided to find homes for these children among rural foster families.



The mechanism is simple but highly effective: the host families provide a stable environment for the children and commit to sending them to school. In return, the families receive rabbits in cages that they can raise for food or sell to generate income. A true solidarity model which characterises so well the spirit of Rwandese Soroptimism!

**Rwandese Soroptimists** are motivated, committed and persevering, and excel in the projects they undertake. They set a strong example for other Clubs and Unions around our Federation and beyond!



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## THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN GIRLS' EDUCATION

In 2012, October 11 was declared International Day of the Girl Child by the United Nations. The day was to have a special focus on improving girls' access to education. The resolution stated that:

*The empowerment of and investment in girls, which are critical for economic growth, including the eradication of poverty, are keys in breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and in promoting and protecting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights.*

The day's theme in 2013 was "Innovating for Girls' Education" as education is a powerful transformative force for societies with positive consequences in all spheres of life that particularly trouble women: reduction in mortality, fertility, poverty and child marriages; equitable growth; improved labour force participation; changes of social norms and ultimately democratisation. To this end, the return on investment on girls' education is a matter of restoration of the fundamental civil rights and liberties beyond any concern for material benefit as an end in itself.

Stating the basic facts:

- Women and girls make up 70% of the world's 1 billion poorest people and earn only 10% of the world's income.
- 39,000 girls under the age of 18 are married every day.
- 31 million girls are currently out of school.
- 28% of girls work as child labourers in the least developed countries.

- 20 million girls are out of school in war zones.
- Every year a girl goes to school can increase her future income by 10%.
- Children with educated mothers are two times more likely to go to school.

The domino effect of investing in girls' education is the most concrete and lasting way out of the cyclical impasse summed up in the statistics above. It's the only valid solution to break the cycle of poverty before it starts by making the best of human resources. As a moral imperative, organisations like ours should focus on reaching girls as early as we can because the development of their potential triggers a chain reaction in them, their households and countries as well as in the global economy. This makes the task an economic necessity too. The cost of ignoring girls' education is catastrophic while the return on investment is immense in terms of humanitarian social goals.

- Emine Erdem

For an example of an effective campaign working to promote girls' education, please see the Girl Effect website at [www.girleffect.org](http://www.girleffect.org)

### IMPORTANT DATES

- Feb 4** World Cancer Day
- Feb 6** International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation
- Feb 21** International Mother Language Day

### HAVE COMMENTS?

This is YOUR newsletter! If you have a comment, document, link, or anything else that you would like us to communicate in an upcoming edition of the newsletter, please share it with us! Feel free to send your news to [programme@soroptimisteurope.org](mailto:programme@soroptimisteurope.org).

### CONTRIBUTORS

**Emine Erdem**, Assistant Programme Director  
**Maria-Elisabetta de Franciscis**, President Elect  
**Anne Simon**, Executive Director  
**Ana Barfield**, Programme and Advocacy Officer  
**Bintou Koïta**, Programme and Advocacy Assistant  
**Gizeh Becerra**, PhD student, Gender issues