EDUCATE & EMPOWER
women to lead

CSW 60
Women key to sustainable development

A federation for AFRICA
Soroptimist International (SI) is a worldwide organisation for women in management and professions, working through service projects to build a better world for women. There are currently some 80,000 members in more than 3,000 clubs in 132 countries. Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) is one of four SI Federations. It has some 34,000 members in 62 countries. Soroptimists inspire action and create opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls through a global network of members and international partnerships. For more information about the aims, activities and projects that characterise our organisation, please visit our SIE website at www.soroptimisteurope.org.

Thank you!

Dear Soroptimists

A big thank you to everyone who sent in congratulations and comments on the first edition of The Link this biennium. We are very grateful for the feedback. It gives us the confidence moving forward that we’re on the right path! Its success largely due to the quality of the excellent articles written by those of you who agreed to give up time from their already packed schedules in order to share their experiences and thoughts with the rest of us. Their expertise is without doubt hugely appreciated by our readers. We express our deep gratitude and heartfelt thanks for their invaluable contribution.

We hope that this second edition of The Link will meet with your approval and enjoy the same level of success. Its main theme is Women’s Empowerment and Leadership, with topical issues such as CSW60 (the United Nations 60th Commission on the Status of Women), International Women’s Day, the Future African Federation, the Empowerment of Women and Girls. Although the articles will present various aspects of Empowerment, I invite you to reflect on the fundamental role played by education in empowering future generations.

Message from the President

Dear Soroptimist Friends

It is with great pleasure that I am sending this second issue of The ‘new’ Link off to the printer: an issue dedicated to a challenging and yet timely subject such as the Empowerment of Women and Girls. Although the articles will present various aspects of Empowerment, I invite you to reflect on the fundamental role played by education in empowering future generations.

STEM education and careers key to empowering women

As a university professor – and as a Soroptimist – I know how important education is in changing the lives of those to whom we offer such an opportunity. Education is a fundamental feature of our mission and, as our records show, we have always invested energy and funds in offering opportunities for better and higher education. Our call now is to make a courageous choice towards the scientific fields. As much as I treasure the value of studying the humanities, we have to recognise that encouraging young women to enter the fields of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) will indeed give them a special stimulus towards true gender equality and leadership roles. Of course, in order to truly succeed on this new path we will need to enter a new battlefield and advocate against cultural gender biases.

A Federation for Africa

I further invite you to read the "special reports" on the SIFAF Meeting held in Madagascar last March. This was a pivotal meeting for our African sisters towards the realisation of their own Federation. We at Soroptimist International of Europe believe they are strong enough to stand and walk and decide on their own on this last stretch of their journey towards making the new Federation. Like parents letting go of their teenagers, we will watch their progress in trepidation and always be ready to offer our helping hand if and when they seek our support.

I hope this new issue of The Link will be as welcomed and appreciated as the previous one. Our Editorial Team has been working hard and with passion to honour our financial commitment with you in accepting your subscriptions. We sincerely hope that you will be as thrilled as we are with its content.

Maria Elisabetta de Francescis
President, Soroptimist International Europe
June 2016
Educating women and girls is the key to the development of a country and to the betterment of society. Education is also essential to freeing the world from gender oppression and economic constraints. Educated women are empowered and can reach leadership positions in the workplace as well as within the civil society. Let me substantiate this claim with some simple facts. In terms of economic growth, each additional year of schooling raises average annual gross domestic product by 0.37 per cent. On average, this additional year of schooling increases personal income by up to 10 per cent. Providing basic reading skills lifts some 171 million people out of poverty. Learning helps build equality

As we all know, the cards are stacked against women in the workplace in the best of conditions. The global labour force participation rate among 25-54 year-olds is 90 per cent men and 55 per cent women. Globally, women earn only three-quarters as much as men – even with the same level of education and in the same occupation. Sadly, there is no simple solution to remedy this situation because some of the problems are political and cultural. However, education is at the very least the foundation upon which change is built. Learning empowers women to help themselves and break the shackles of inequality. Therefore, promoting and supporting education are two very concrete ways that our organisation can offer to improve the lives of women and girls – whether it be teaching a young girl to read or providing a grant to a PhD student.

Literacy creates a better world
UNESCO is a beacon for these principles by declaring that access to quality education is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for human development. Its message and policies are totally in line with our own vision and mission: literacy empowers individuals, families and communities, and it improves their quality of life. Because of its “multiplier effect” literacy helps eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, curb population growth, achieve gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy.

Invest in education to empower women
For all these reasons, I encourage Soroptimists to invest in education, and more specifically in the STEM disciplines. I can think of no better legacy for this biennium than the knowledge that we helped even more women and girls achieve their full potential.

As a university professor, I have dedicated my professional life to academic research and teaching. It is therefore not surprising that I am passionate about education and its benefits, and this passion prompted me to choose an education-related theme for my biennium. Clearly, many Soroptimists share this commitment with me because many Unions and Clubs of our Federation already spend thousands of euros every year to fund a wide range of projects in the fields of education and mentoring. The reasons are obvious.

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, SIE President

"... it is time to create a world where all women can meet their potential without impediment or prejudice"

Christine Lagarde, Managing Director IMS
Empowerment - Leadership styles

Experts have identified three main characteristics that distinguish the leadership styles adopted by men and women. Which is yours and which works best?

Transformational leadership
Where ‘leaders and followers raise one another to focus on higher levels of morality and motivation’. This practice is characterised by idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Transformational leaders focus on emotions, pursue professional relationships with open lines of communication and share fully in their responsibilities.

Transactional leadership
Emphasises exchanges and bargaining between leaders and subordinates that are typically economic, political or psychological in nature. Its primary characteristic is that nothing holds leaders and followers together. Transactional leaders motivate their followers by appealing to their self-interest. This style of leadership is built on the premise that team members or subordinates agree to obey their leader completely.

Laissez-faire leadership
The laissez-faire type of leadership is marked by an overall failure to take responsibility for managing. In this case, leaders or managers leave subordinates to their own devices and provide little direction.

Which is your leadership style?
Women tend to adopt the transformational leadership style, which encompasses being more kind, conscientious, emotionally flexible and open to experience than men, and because they are generally more relationship-oriented. Male leaders, on the other hand, are more likely to manifest transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles.

Management styles most closely associated with women tend to be better suited to the 21st century. These styles, which are more kind, conscientious, emotionally flexible and open to experience than men, are generally more relationship-oriented. Male leaders, on the other hand, are more likely to manifest transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles.

Soroptimist leadership
A fundamental virtue

Marie-Jeanne Bosia Berberat,
Past SI and SIE President / Honorary President of the Swiss Union

An entrepreneur throughout my entire professional life, founding President of the group ‘Women, small and medium-sized businesses in Switzerland’, founding President of the Soroptimist International Club of Lugano, later elected President of the Swiss Union, later as President of the European Federation and finally as International President, I have always cared about worldwide entrepreneurial dynamics and even more so where they concern women. But how do they benefit a volunteer organisation?

Let us look at this from a wider point of view. Today, the themes of International Conferences on women and their status, centre on:
- Parity
- Women’s rights
- Economics in relation to women
- Women in power and decision-making
- Education and training of women
- Women’s enhancement and its institutional mechanism
- Women in the media

These are also the essential topics addressed by Soroptimists. During my SI presidency, I maintained that women’s education was the key to progress. In fact, this became the theme SI brought to Beijing in 1995 for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Let us now take a look at leadership in the Soroptimist environment and the responsibility of Presidents at all levels.

The role of a President, at whatever level of our organisation, is vital. Future candidates need to be aware that their organisational skills will be a determining factor in the successful outcome of their tasks.

Every Soroptimist must be aware that she is the guarantor of the values for which our organisation stands. Our motivation, our enthusiasm and our conviction that we have a positive part to play in society, are of utmost importance. Every two years, a new President must bring her own personality, her dedication, her desire for action and her innovative spirit to the fore and at all levels.

Thanks to her amiable character and her availability, she will be able to enthuse, direct and inspire the voluntary work of members. She will need to build a network that will work in harmony with the needs of our Soroptimist society of today.

Good communication, through dialogue, transparency, attentiveness and contact is elementary for the unity of our organisation and for its future.

Still, she must never forget or neglect the friendship and solidarity that are and have always been the fundamental pillars of Soroptimist International and without which nothing would ever have been accomplished.
EMPOWERMENT & LEADERSHIP

Women’s leadership

Where are the women?

Anne Simon, SIE Executive Director

If you ask around you what people understand by leadership and what characterises a good leader, you will hear a different answer every time. Everyone has his or her own idea of what makes a good leader, but a common characteristic could be that ‘Leaders are people who know how to achieve goals and inspire people along the way’.

Why are there so few women leaders?

These days, women start their careers in business and other professions with the same level of intelligence, education, and commitment as men. At entry level, more than half an organisation’s employees are female.

Yet, around the world, we see that the higher women climb up the corporate ladder, the more they seem to disappear. At the CEO level, worldwide, we are left with only three to four per cent who are women! So, what goes wrong?

Is it a skill problem?

When looking at senior female managers, studies and experts all acknowledge women’s excellence in efficiency and recognise their competence in leadership.

Women leaders also seem very capable of developing highly important competencies, such as developing others, inspiring and motivating others, building relationships, collaboration and teamwork. Women, in particular, also tend to be skilled in taking initiative, displaying integrity and honesty, and driving for results. Studies show that women are actually seen to be more effective than men in getting things done, being role models and delivering results.

Interestingly, the consulting firm McKinsey – which has done large studies on women and leadership – highlights that the higher women move up an organisation’s ladder, the more positively they are perceived!

So where is the gap?

Experts tend to agree that current work policies and practices, which have been around for years, favour the mismatch between how women are perceived compared to the qualities people tend to associate with male leaders.

Indeed, these organisational structures and work practices were designed long ago by men to respond to men’s lives and development – as the family’s only breadwinner. Remember that in those days women only represented a very small percentage of the workforce.

Since then, society has also changed. Technology and modern tools created an accelerated path to competitiveness, speeding up decision-making processes and generating increased stress for leaders.

McKinsey also notes that a crucial survival element for leaders is to manage their energy levels – be they men or women. Today’s executives work hard. 60 per cent of senior executives toil more than 50 hours a week, and 10 per cent more than 80 hours a week. When it comes to women, many then come home from work only to sign onto a ‘second shift’: 90 per cent of women still manage all household tasks, such as meal preparation and child care.

What is known as ‘work-life balance’ is certainly a myth. Until we re-address the question as a societal issue at large and revisit our approach to work – and to leadership – society will continue to lack women leaders.

A matter of social justice?

Around the globe, opportunities for Women and Girls are either enabled or limited within their own countries. In essence, social norms are shaped by national and local culture, which, in turn, has an impact on groups, individuals and the relationships between them. Empowering Women and Girls is therefore the only way to promote greater equality in their relationships with men and boys, within their families and in society.

Improving the lives of Women and Girls starts with reducing gender gaps. But most importantly, it means challenging very deeply rooted cultural and social norms.

Empowering women and girls and achieving gender equality is a long-term process that requires change at a number of levels. It is the responsibility of national states to design proper policies and of the private sector to create equal opportunities in the workplace, but also of civil society which can help change those norms and stereotypes. Last, but not least, it is up to Women and Girls themselves – as well as men and boys – to drive change. Aren’t we, as mothers and fathers, the key agents of change?

A key to gender equality

Eliminate stereotypes and change social norms

We cannot address the question of women’s empowerment in the same way everywhere. Women’s position in society varies depending on whether they live North, South, East or West, in highly developed or low-to-middle income countries, or in rural or urban areas.

But globally, one thing is clear: Women and Girls still lag behind men and boys in most key areas such as rights, opportunities and capabilities.

Thanks to continuing pressure by institutions, such as the United Nations or Council of Europe – and of Women’s movements – most states now recognise ‘empowerment’ to be fundamental to the rights of Women and Girls. Yet, gender inequalities, even in the most developed countries of the globe, still persist.

World leaders mobilise

At the last G7, world leaders agreed that empowering Women and Girls and achieving gender equality are key to the development of open and prosperous societies.

They identified key barriers to global gender equality: discriminatory laws; gender stereotypes in societies; low levels of education; lack of access to health care; and the disproportionate effect of poverty on Women.

*Women’s empowerment... is a fundamental right, but what is often overlooked is that societies and economies cannot be successful without gender equality* – Angela Merkel

KEY FACTS

| 60% of executives work over 50 hours a week |
| 10% of executives work over 80 hours a week |
| 92% of women still manage all household tasks |

Cardiovascular disease kills more women than cancer

Empowerment and health

Rita De Groot, Belgian doctor and member of SI Belgium’s Antwerp Club, answers our questions on the impact of health on women’s empowerment – and vice versa.

The Link: Health development has seen incredible progress over the last decades and has been key to the development of women’s status and at the heart of their empowerment. Yet we see more and more women affected by non-communicable diseases such as heart problems. Could gender equality at work be to blame?

Rita: Non-communicable diseases – by definition not passed on from one person to the next – make up the world’s number one cause of death: three in five people die as a result of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, or chronic disease of the respiratory tract.

Cardiovascular disease kills more women than cancer

Women-specific risk factors include smoking, especially in combination with the contraceptive pill, physical inactivity and being overweight. Relatively well protected until menopause, heart attacks are less frequent in women, but more fatal. When women reach the age of 55, the rate of cardiovascular events reaches that of men, and then exceeds it.

Is this linked to the emancipation of women? Equal pay, equal work, equal diseases? Over the last few decades, our way of life has reached that of men, and then exceeds it.

While Romanians in leadership positions in Romania, at all levels of the professional hierarchy, in state-owned, private or freelance businesses. I presume Romanian society owes this to former communist policies regarding the advancement of an equal number of men and women to management positions. Paradoxically, the post-communist 1990s upset the gender balance, although not too dramatically.

I would say that, overall, the major barriers for Romanian women today are less related to gender discrimination and rather more to economic and cultural factors. I remember the tall ‘barrers’ I myself had to get over when I started my firm: lots of costs, expenses and taxes related to setting up and running the business; no support for young entrepreneurs from governing professional bodies; administrative bureaucracy; the nail-biting waiting process to obtain legal approvals; and high commission and interest rates at banks.

A greater obstacle for most women today though is the community’s attitude to male and female social roles. Romanian society is still very traditional and a woman is seen as a ‘must-be’ wife and mother, meaning she must spend time on cooking, house cleaning, babysitting or entertaining her husband. But I believe that women themselves are the greatest barrier of all: the way they see themselves, the way they understand their status and how they chose to play their role in society.

To conclude, I would say that I think a good level of education is the pre-requisite of attaining a leadership position but not a guarantee that this will be achieved.

The Link: While Romanian women attain a very good level of education, the country as a whole seems to have a very low number of women attaining leadership positions. As a successful business leader yourself, what do you see as the major barriers for women today?

Viorica: Contrary to some current misconceptions, there are many women in leadership positions in Romania, at all levels of the professional hierarchy, in state-owned, private or freelance businesses. I presume Romanian society owes this to former communist policies regarding the advancement of an equal number of men and women to management positions. Paradoxically, the post-communist 1990s upset the gender balance, although not too dramatically.

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To conclude, I would say that I think a good level of education is the pre-requisite of attaining a leadership position but not a guarantee that this will be achieved.

The Link: What advice would you give to younger women interested in climbing the career ladder to leadership?

Viorica: It is so hard to choose the best advice to give them, but firstly I would tell them to be determined because determination involves hard work, development of abilities and building self-confidence. I would also advise them to take initiative – since initiative is a measure of self-sustainability based on a person’s own judgement and the ability to act and make decisions. These are both essential qualities for a leader.

Viorica: I would further suggest that they should dare, and daring means having the courage to look for opportunities and new challenges all the time. Finally, I would tell younger women never to forget that they themselves are the limit to how far they can go or reach in life.
Why is Iceland the best country for women?

The Link interviewed Gudbjörg Linda Rafsdóttir and Gudbjörg Andrea Jónsdóttir – both leading academics and members of the Soroptist Union of Iceland’s Reykjavik Club – to discover why their country has such an excellent record in women’s equality and empowerment.

Andrea and Linda: Iceland shares its welfare model and gender regime to a large extent with the rest of the Nordic countries, which also score highly on the Global Gender Index. The Nordic Welfare model is known as an active welfare and gender regime. It promotes ‘defamilisation’, which has been defined as the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independent of family relationships, either through paid work or through social security provisions. Thus, Iceland has moved away from a male breadwinner model by supporting a range of policies to strengthen women’s positions in the labour market, economic independence and the reconciliation of work and family. Parents get nine months’ paid parental leave; fathers and mothers are each given three months, and together they get three months to share. There are inexpensive municipal childcare facilities for pre-school children, a legal right for parents to return to their jobs after parental leave and to stay at home if their child is sick.

Overall, Iceland has progressive legislation on gender equality and was one of the first countries in the world to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society and political context are crucial if a gender policy is to succeed. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality. The Civil Society to pass general laws on gender equality.

UKRAINE

Soroptimists from Uzhgorod in Ukraine have initiated the Soroptimist Mother and Child (M&C) Educational Centre project with the objective of empowering 240 women and 300 children in 2016. Currently, they are providing seminars on personal and professional development along with business start-up workshops for 25 women. Three of the women trained will be eligible for microloans for their start-ups, as well as coaching to help them excel in their field. Loans will be repayable in a year which will in turn provide microloan funds for other women’s start-ups. This will also allow women to get a good knowledge of business and training experience.

The M&C club will provide training, mentoring and support to 240 women and girls. The M&C educational centre’s mission is to:

- empower women in their personal and professional growth through training and personal support
- welcome and nurture all children
- assist mothers and others to meet the challenges of parenting
- offer classes, workshops and mentoring opportunities.

HAÏTI

Port au Prince Soroptimists have initiated a project to build a shed housing a grain mill for women. This mill will enable women of the MPCS Association (Mouvement Paysan Chambrun Sarazin) to grind their grain locally. Before, they had to pay transportation costs to travel to another city to do so. Their expenses will decline and they will have more time to devote to their business and family activities, so the project will improve income, as well as women’s working hours and conditions.

The project includes training sessions to teach them how to manage the mill, maintain the facilities, meet environmental sanitation standards, and manage production and product sales. Funds generated will cover operating costs and pay employees while future profits will be used to finance other MPCS Association activities such as building a poultry facility.
The conclusions of CSW60’s 14-24 March 2016 session, with its headline theme of ‘Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development,’ highlight that if the 2030 50-50 agenda is to be achieved, it is vital to address the multiple needs—humanitarian, economic, social, educational, cultural, and health—of women and girls. The commission also agreed on the importance of a specific urgent approach to call for an end to violence against women and girls.

The commission reiterated that realizing full human potential and sustainable development will not be possible if we continue to deny women and girls their human rights, including the right to achieve their potential.

The commission reaffirmed that implementing the right to education is helping to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human rights, sustainable development, and the eradication of poverty. Girls must receive quality education and be able to easily access not only primary school, but also higher education and vocational training. This is the key to achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and the realization of their full potential.

The findings urge Governments to strengthen the leadership and participation of women in all areas of sustainable development decision-making, to strengthen normative, legal and political frameworks, to adopt laws that criminalize violence against women and girls, to ensure they are applied, and to promote governments agreed on the need of all women and girls including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The commission invites men, boys and community leaders to fully commit to change and to be strategic partners of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, both in public and in private. With regards to financing, in order to achieve the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda, governments agreed on the need to increase investment. Developed countries must not only honour their commitment to help developing countries but increase it substantially.

The Commission recommended four draft resolutions to ECOSOC including measures relating to fighting against the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls; women and children hostages — including those imprisoned during armed conflicts; Palestinian women: urgent gender data needed for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

According to ‘Women absolute parallel status would be the surest mark of civilization, and it would double the intellectual forces of mankind.’

Stendhal 1783 - 1842

‘SO LONG AS THERE ARE WOMEN’

60th Commission on the Status of Women 2016

Marie-Claude Bertrand, SIE Vice President Communication

Making an impact at CSW60

Sigrid AG, SIE Vice President Advocacy

CSW is a unique arena for leaders in gender equality and women’s empowerment, such as Soroptimists, to influence the UN agenda and ensure that the Beijing Platform for Action is integrated to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Article 71 of the UN Charter guarantees to civil society the right to intervene and work with governments. Soroptimist International (SI) has consultative status with the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which oversees UN activities and policies promoting human rights. SI representatives can request agenda items, submit written statements for circulation to all members of the council, make oral statements at meetings, and contribute to other UN gatherings and seminars.

President Elisabetta headed the delegation of 20 European Soroptimists to CSW this year. Soroptimists from Italy, Iceland, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway attended daily morning briefings, seminars, meetings and other events, and were also able to meet their respective country delegations to advocate for the Soroptimist mission.

GE is uniquely positioned with UN centres located in Geneva, Nairobi, Paris, Rome and Vienna. Our UN representatives are appointed by SI, and work as volunteers spending long hours at UN centres giving a collective voice to improve the lives of women and girls.

Education and working with institutions

Leading the SI delegation, our President emphasised to CSW60 delegates and participants how Soroptimists support the Commission’s goals through their focus on Education. “We promoted two main messages,” said Elisabetta, “Educate to Lead,” (demonstrated by an existing project to rebuild schools in Nepal), and ‘Educate to eliminate violence against women’.

She also highlighted the active role played by Soroptimists in Italy, particularly their successful collaboration with institutions, such as: providing courtrooms for hearing minors who are victims of violence; drawing up a protocol with the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) for training teachers on gender issues in schools, and another with Unioncamere on women’s education; and their support for the introduction of the ‘White Rose Code’ in emergency departments, bringing together a network of local health authorities, public prosecutor’s offices, police forces and voluntary associations for prompt intervention to protect victims of violence.

Other examples included the promotion of job opportunities for women, and the implementation of ‘dedicated rooms’ in Italian police (Carabinieri) stations for handling reports of violence in privacy. “I believe it to be the first time that the General Command of the Carabinieri has given specific instructions as a result of working with an association like ours,” says de francisco.

We look forward to reviewing SIE’s progress on these issues in July 2017 at the 21st Congress of the European Federation at the Forteza da Basso in Florence.
Soroptimists influence CSW60

Soroptimists had the opportunity to promote our goals and actions to inspire over 8,000 delegates attending this year’s 60th UN Commission on the Status of Women and to advocate how best to include and empower women through sustainable development, eliminating gender-based violence and promoting the human rights of women and girls.

CSW60 primary theme: Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development. Already a key issue for SI, women’s empowerment is increasingly important for sustainable development. Our delegates were able to highlight Soroptimists’ strategic ‘3Es: Educate, Empower and Enable’ that underpin project work done by our clubs across the globe.

Empowerment can be thought of as a multi-dimensional process that helps people gain control over their own lives, as contributors and leaders in their communities. For women and girls without empowerment, it will be impossible to achieve gender equality.

By better involving women at all stages, gender mainstreaming will become almost automatic and drive the empowerment of women and girls.

CSW60 review theme: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls

This year’s SI statement to CSW60 focused on actions that can be taken to eliminate violence against women and girls across all countries and communities. You can read the full statement on our website: www.soroptimistinternational.org.

By advocating the elimination of violence and empowering women and girls, Soroptimists at CSW60 contributed to actions that will be taken by NGOs, civil society, government and international agencies over the next fifteen years.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

For Soroptimists, every day is International Women’s Day

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, Soroptimists renew their pledge to combat any form of violence against women and girls, and to support women’s and girls’ education and empowerment. This year again, Soroptimists have been very active as you can see here in this impressive list of our Union and Club actions!

FRANCE

The Union of France participated in an interactive session on ‘Who are the industries?’ which is the culmination of a yearlong drive to encourage women to pursue careers in technology. SI France has presented three ‘Women & Technology’ prizes. This activity is in line with the biennium theme ‘Soroptimists Invest in Education’ with particular focus on women and girls choosing career paths in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics).

AUSTRIA

SI Austria Clubs planned a wide range of public events from self-defence training and film viewings to talks on subjects such as women in business, equal opportunities for women and single parenting.

RUANDA

SI Rwanda organised marches in areas where SI Clubs are located as part of the national celebration of the theme, ‘Step it up for gender equality. Strive for women empowerment’! They also organised a radio broadcast and supported local child mothers by funding their health insurance.

DENMARK

SI Denmark took this opportunity to raise awareness of its work to stop trafficking.

BULGARIA

SI Bulgaria supported a conference on Women for Development, which will discuss the importance of taking a proactive position on social issues.

ITALY

Responding to an initiative of the Ministry of Universities and Research and the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, several clubs of SI Italy participated in special events to encourage girls students to study STEM subjects. Soroptimists addressed the issue of equal opportunities at these events.

HAÏTI

SI Club Port au Prince sponsored a talk by a specialist highlighting the problems faced by women who became disabled after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. They have also donated personal hygiene products and toiletries to women inmates of an urban correctional facility.

PROGETTO STEM

SI Rwanda organised marches in areas where SI Clubs are located as part of the national celebration of the theme, ‘Step it up for gender equality. Strive for women empowerment!’ They also organised a radio broadcast and supported local child mothers by funding their health insurance.

SLOVENIA

SI Slovenia has organised its eleventh International Women’s Day concert, featuring well-known musicians who support the Club’s projects. Proceeds from ticket sales and donations are given to causes aimed at improving the position of women and helping socially vulnerable families.

MADAGASCAR

SI Madagascar supported women prisoners with children and organised a conference with women magistrates to inform women from slums about their legal rights in cases of domestic violence.
The beautiful city of Lisbon hosted the SIE Training Seminar for Union and Single Club Programme Directors (PDs) from 20 to May 22, 2016. This first interactive Seminar of the biennium was intended as a platform for exchanges on programme and advocacy practices.

The 39 participants came from 29 Soroptimist European countries, representing 18 Unions and 11 Single Clubs. Anne Simon, Executive Director and Bintou Koïta, Programme and Advocacy Officer at SIE HQ, Marlène Van Benthem, SIE Programme Director (PD), Caroline Junier, SIE Assistant Programme Director and Sigrid Ag, SIE Vice President Lobbying, made up the Seminar’s Training team, led by Renata Trottmann Probst, SIE President-elect.

A series of plenary sessions, workshops and discussions took place throughout the day and a half of training in a city centre hotel. Workshops tailored to each participant’s specific needs were held for the representatives of the Unions and Single clubs - the first time the latter had attended such a Seminar.

Defining and strengthening the PDs’ role

The first half-day’s training addressed broader themes such as the organisation, its mission, vision and operation, and touched on strategy. During the workshops, participants focused on the role and responsibilities of their function at Union or individual Club level, their scope, and effective networking. The debate very quickly turned to the critical need for the PDs to reintegrate the Board of the Unions and Clubs, in order to better carry out their function at the core of Soroptimist activity.

Importance of reporting

Programme, advocacy and communication were the main themes of the second day. Discussion took place highlighting the tools available as well as the role and the importance of the PFRs, and then how to adapt the latter to facilitate the work of the editors and correspond to the expectations of the PDs and SIE.

Soroptimists fight illiteracy in partnership with My Book Buddy – Biennium project

The key topic was the discussion of the Federation Project for 2015-2017. In conjunction with the theme of our SIE President, Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, Soroptimists invest in education, it aims to give girls greater access to books. In partnership with My Book Buddy, a Dutch organisation, the concept is to provide schools, shelters and refugee camps with mini-libraries of books for children and at the same time to show teachers how to administer a loaning scheme. Children also make the library resource available to their families. The workshops helped sound out the PDs with regards to the feasibility of the project and how best to implement it.

Building networks and sharing expertise

This seminar offered a great opportunity for everyone to come together, to create networks of expertise, to share the many practices and competences spread across the Unions and Single clubs, to raise concerns, and above all to strengthen ties between Unions, Clubs and the Federation.

Experiencing Lisbon together

There was also some time for a spot of sightseeing. A wonderful tuk-tuk tour of the city and the opportunity to sample some local Lisbon food provided unforgettable shared moments.

A word of thanks

We would like to thank Anne Simon and Bintou Koïta of SIE HQ, and Alexandra Costa and Ivone Matos in Lisbon for their great organisational skills, and all of the SIE Programme & Advocacy team. To conclude, we extend our gratitude to the participants for their commitment, enthusiasm and creativity.
The importance of reporting
Why the world needs to know

Bintou Koïta, SIE Programme and Advocacy Officer

Don’t be shy - tell us about your projects!
How often do we hear Clubs talking passionately about their projects and the amazing experiences they have had helping women?

Sadly, only a small amount of what is actually happening at Union and Club level is reported through the SIE Programme Focus Report (PFR) system. Indeed, there is a lot more being done in local communities and the PFR offers an invaluable tool to help Unions and Clubs bring these projects out into the limelight.

Most Soroptimist projects – all locally designed, locally funded, and locally implemented – demonstrate clearly the overwhelming challenges women and girls still face today.

The PFR reporting system showcases the wonderful work being done in local communities and the PFR offers an invaluable tool to help Unions and Clubs bring these projects out into the limelight.

The Link No. 2 - Biennium 2015-2017
FEDERATION NEWS

19th
Journées d’expression Française

Marie Claude Bertrand, SIE Vice President Communication

The very first JEF (Journées d’expression Française) event was organised in Lyon in 1980 under the chairmanship of Yvette Brun. It was Rolande Becker, a member of SI Lyon and Janine Durand a member of SI Valenciennes, both then Governors of the French Union, who came up with the idea. The event is held every other year in a French-speaking city and with a specific social theme.

In tribute to the founder, the French Union invited the SI Lyon and Lyon Tête d’Or Clubs to organise the 2016 weekend – in Lyon.

The chosen theme, “French of all colours”, brought together more than 180 Soroptimists from French-speaking countries, as well as several British and Dutch friends, all of whom much appreciated the excellent programme of cultural events. Rolande Becker, and Yvette Brun gave a very moving presentation.

The Link interviewed Marie Anne Thivolle, a German Professor from Germany and SI Lyon Tête d’Or Secretary, who answered our questions on behalf of the SI Lyon and Lyon Tête d’Or Clubs.

The Link: Why did you choose this particular theme?
Marie Anne : We wanted French to be represented through all its cultural, linguistic, geographical, oral and lexical diversity. Its accents and variations enrich our language: as Henriette Walter* said: “...We wanted to show that our language is neither out-dated nor ossified, but rather how it can and should provide a bridge between cultures, countries and continents.”

The Link: Why did you choose this particular theme?
Marie Anne: These gatherings have confirmed that French opens the door to liberty and integration both personally and professionally. French is a very rich language and each participant, regardless of age and origin, has played a part in proving this.

The Link: What are your recommendations going forward to ensure the continued success of the French Expression days?
Marie Anne: We wish the event a long and fruitful future, and hope that above all it remains a lively, animated occasion, helping to remind us that the language’s vitality, and the ability to master it, offer the keys to success, cohesion and fraternity - in all its colours.

* Henriette Walter (linguist professor, Université de Bretagne)

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The Link: In your opinion has the goal you set been achieved and, if so, how?
Marie Anne: These gatherings have confirmed that French opens the door to liberty and integration both personally and professionally. French is a very rich language and each participant, regardless of age and origin, has played a part in proving this.

The Link: What are your recommendations going forward to ensure the continued success of the French Expression days?
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One continent
Towards one federation

Renata Trottmann Probst, SIE President Elect & SIE Liaison Africa

Traditionally, English-speaking countries in Africa have been part of the Federation of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI), whereas French-speaking countries have been part of the European Federation (SIE). Working towards the establishment of an African Federation, a joint SIGBI/SIE Working Group was set up in 2014 to support the African Task Force responsible for this ambitious goal. Over the past four years, the legal and organisational setup of the African Federation has been successfully completed. A Task Force mirroring a Federation Board, a Constitution and role specifications, financial rules, a logo and strapline, and project work have all been put in place.

Our Federation is extremely aware of the great amount of work being done to turn this vision into reality. Bringing together members from two Federations, on a vast continent characterised by great cultural diversity, is no small challenge. SIE is proud to have been part of this process and is now ready to give full ownership to our African members. There is still some way to go, especially in terms of growing membership across Africa. Our fellow African Soroptimists will know best when the time is right for them to inaugurate their own Federation.

Let us all help grow membership in Africa

Gerda Rosiers, wSIE Extension Committee Chair

To ensure the sustainability of the African Federation over the long term, it is vital we gather ideas and views of African Soroptimists on the current state of our organisation and the challenges they come up against in terms of recruitment and retention.

Just as with our European Clubs, it is essential that Africa addresses the challenge of increasing its membership numbers along with the consolidation of its Clubs and Unions. They are aware that without an increase in the number of members, it won’t be possible to revitalise the African Federation in the foreseeable future. We can and want to help them to recruit and retain members, taking into account the specificity of the African continent.

At the conference, SIE representatives took the opportunity to share helpful pointers and advice on how best to recruit and retain African Soroptimists - such as lining up good guest speakers for conferences and giving responsibilities to new members.

Recruitment is the responsibility of all Soroptimists.

Why create an African Federation?

Nneka Chris-Asoluka, SIFAF Taskforce Chair

The idea for a Soroptimist African Federation was first mooted in 1987. Many discussions later, our dream is finally within reach.

So, why create an African Federation?

• To create closer ties amongst the African sisters
• The sense of belonging that will drive the challenge to succeed and propel them to greater heights
• To open up Soroptimism in Africa by creating more awareness. This will give rise to more Clubs and increase in membership. More clubs will result in more programmes and projects in African communities.
• Independence breeds creativity.

And, what obstacles and challenges do we face?

• Language barrier
• Communication difficulties – internet and telephone services are a very expensive means of communication in Africa
• Fall in membership making it difficult to reach the 2,000 plus members required to form a Federation
• Finance – Clubs are not paying their dues.

When we work together as sisters, we will conquer and we have resolved to do just that!

A vision for the future

Emine Erdem, SIE Vice President Extension Africa

Last March in Antananarivo, Madagascar, we met with the original Soroptimist spirit to discuss the future African Federation: “To foster the spirit of service as the basis of all worthy enterprises.” A Pan-African meeting was held with the goal of drawing up a realistic road map for the sustainable development of the Soroptimist network in Africa.

Over the last three decades of establishing SIFAF, we have come to understand that extension in Africa requires a new perspective and strategy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success. African Soroptimists have been doing their best to keep the level of willingness high, constantly busy for success.

"Stars shine the brightest in the dark.” Our hope is strong that our African sisters will raise the Soroptimist flag to revitalise the African Federation.

FEDERATION NEWS

A Pan-African meeting on recruitment was held with the goal of drawing up a realistic road map for the sustainable development of the African Federation.
Federation project: Soroptimists fight illiteracy in partnership with My Book Buddy

Within the context of the Biennium theme Soroptimist Involved in Education, we hope to have a Federation project to present to the Governors. The project ‘Soroptimists fight illiteracy in partnership with My Book Buddy’ was discussed with the SIE Programme Directors taking part in the Training Seminar held in Lisbon in late May (see article pages 14 & 15). The concept is, basically, to set up dedicated libraries for less privileged populations to provide them with books: Books in Schools; Books in Shelters; Books in Refugee Camps.

Marlène van Benthem, SIE Programme Director, together with Assistant Programme Director Caroline Junier, debated the possibility of introducing a project like this in their Unions. In a parallel session run, Single Club Programme Directors, together with Union Programme Directors, discussed the possibility of implementing such an educational programme in their own countries. The Soroptimist-branded bookcase would be aimed at women and children. This initial brainstorming stimulated much interest and the project will now be discussed locally at Union level.

New website in development

Significant efforts were made during the first six months of the biennium to search for agencies to design a new SIE website that could serve our membership and help with branding.

The Communications’ team developed a new approach that places our Unions and Clubs at the heart of Communications. The new SIE Website will become a window onto the Federations’ presence across its 62 countries. Its design will highlight the outstanding projects done by Soroptimist members each day in their countries. The 24 Union Presidents and their Programme Directors are currently selecting and submitting their three preferred projects. Single Clubs, showcased country by country, are currently in the process of sending in their best project and loads of photos. More than 160 projects will be on the website by the end of the summer! Such a mosaic of projects and photos shows how creative Soroptimists are! The new website will be presented at the Governors’ Meeting in Sofia.
**Announcements**

**GERMANY**

All the German clubs on bicycles! 

On the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons on 30 July 2016, the Soroptimist International Union of Germany is calling a nationwide campaign to engage all SI Clubs in a common project: ride a bike all together and at the same time. The idea is to be visible on that important day and to set an example.

The occasion will also be used to raise funds to support a school project for Syrian refugees in Gaziantep and Mardin (Turkey).

Further details can be found on the SI Germany website: http://www.soroptimist.de/home/

**SWITZERLAND**

Friendship meeting

The Soroptimist International Union of Switzerland invites you to a German-speaking Friendship meeting in Thun, in the foothills of the Bernese Alps from 16 to 18 September 2016.

Further information and registration is available on the SIE Swiss and German Union websites: http://swiss-soroptimist.ch/ http://www.soroptimist.de/home/

**NORDIC DAYS**

Finland

The Nordic Soroptimist Meeting will be held in Imatra and Lappeenranta in Finland, from Friday the 9 September to Sunday the 11 September 2016. The seminar programme will be a combination of serious issues on the theme “Breaking Barriers” and entertaining stimuli for the body and soul. Our keynote speaker will be President Tarja Halonen.

Sign up by 30 June 2016 on the Nordic Soroptimist Meeting website: http://nordicsoroptimist2016.fi/welcome/

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**Extension update – new clubs and new members!**

Gerda Rosiers, SIE Extension Committee Chair

As of 30 June 2015, SIE had 34,046 members and 1,248 clubs. Since 1 October 2015, 15 new clubs have received their Charter including two Single Clubs in existing countries and one in a new country, Kuwait. Between now and the end of October, six other clubs will be inaugurated, bringing in approximately 150 new members.

Our strategy should focus first on countries where we already have clubs. Extension is a priority. We need to attract young professionals in order to grow and develop our organisation. To ensure it thrives from one generation to the next there are many different ways to identify new potential members: one of the most effective is to promote our projects since successful projects attract interest and new members.

We should also focus our messages on the benefits of our organisation and draw attention to Soroptimists’ very high values, effective and quality projects and its professional network.

Together we can make a difference!

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**Belgian club celebrates Golden Jubilee**

Régine Palmers, President, Soroptimist Club of Hasselt

It was an honour for our 48 current SI Hasselt club members and three founder members to be joined by our SIE President for our Golden Jubilee on 23 April 2016.

Elisabetta started her day meeting our Belgian Committee. She acknowledged our anniversary project ‘YAR Flanders’ as a prime example of the Soroptimist goal ‘to build peace through education, autonomy and independence’… ‘Copies of the cookery book containing members’ own recipes – the ‘Kookkunsboek’ – published to benefit YAR Flanders, were on sale at the celebration.

250 Soroptimists from all over Belgium attended the celebration in the ‘Oude Gevangenis’, a cosy historical university building. SI President, Yvonne Simpson, surprised us with a Skype call to wish us all good luck, while a 92-year-old club member lit the SI candle.

True to our motto ‘conviviality in involvement’, we ended this memorable event with a gourmet reception.

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**Rest of the world**

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Calendar

New SIE club charters

18 June 2016
Düsseldorf-Oberkassel (Germany)
Charter to be presented by Gerda Rosiers,
SIE Extension Chairperson
Club President - Belinda Steiert
Phone: +49 211 176 8920
Email: kanzlei_steiert@yahoo.de

3 September 2016
Erwitte-Hellweg (Germany)
Charter to be presented by Karla Greipl,
SIE Constitution & By-Laws Committee Member
Club President - Claudia Michalke
Phone: +49 2943 486737
Email: claudia.michalke@t-online.de

3 September 2016
Jura Région (Switzerland)
Charter to be presented by Marie-Jeanne Bosia,
Past SIE President
Club President - Nadine Corbat
Phone: 079 512 11 93
Email: nadine.corbat@frij.ch

30 September 2016
Beauvais Les Salamandres (France)
Charter to be presented by: To Be Announced
Club President - Marie Segura
Phone: +33 6 88 33 18 85
Email: marylasseg@gmail.com

1 October 2016
Radding-Gram-Toftlund (Denmark)
Charter to be presented by: To Be Announced
Club President - Anne-Mette Frandsen
Email: anne-mette-frandsen@hotmail.com

8 October 2016
Bennekom & Beekdal (The Netherlands)
Charter to be presented by Anne-Marie Hendrickx,
SIE Treasurer
Club President - Helma Nijssen
Phone: +31 6 133 633 20 / +31 3 184 194 17
Email: info@nijssenpartners.nl

Anniversaries

1 June 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Bad Nauheim (Germany)

1 June 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Madrid (Spain)

9 June 2016
50th Anniversary - SI Levanger (Norway)

29 June 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Bielsko-Biała (Poland)

29 June 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Fricktal (Switzerland)

14 September 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Oldenburg (Germany)

21 September 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Chianciano-Montepulciano (Italy)

21 September 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Brno (Czechia)

28 September 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Milazzo (Italy)

05 October 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Stade (Germany)

05 October 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Voorne-Putten/Rozenburg (The Netherlands)

23 October 2016
50th Anniversary - SI Terni (Italy)

26 October 2016
25th Anniversary - SI Liechtenstein (Liechtenstein)

Forthcoming SIE events

9-10 July 2016
Governors’ Meeting - Sofia (Bulgaria)

International awareness days and events

4-22 July 2016
CEDAW’s 64th session at the UN in Geneva

8 September 2016
International Literacy Day

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