



09/10 2017

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY TEAM!



Dear Soroptimists,

It has been almost two years since we designed the first combined newsletter of Programme and Advocacy. Our aim was to bring closer together these two strategic areas of focus, that are the *raison d'être* of SIE. During President Elisabetta's biennium, our members had the opportunity to read about numerous wonderful Education projects, our Reps gave them inside knowledge about the institutions with whom we advocate, and they saw the world through other Soroptimists' eyes, thanks to the "My Vision" series!

As an organization constantly striving to adapt itself to the needs of our members and an ever increasingly dynamic world, for the next biennium we will review our own means and channels of communication; consequently, this might be the final edition of the PAN. To conclude, I would like to say "thank you!" to all those who contributed to making this PAN an entertaining and informative read, as well as to all of our readers

Renata Trottmann Probst, President Elect and head 'Programme & Advocacy'

This month we talk about: EDUCATION

IN THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Page 1-2: Soroptimists invest in education
- ◆ Page 3: Series of "My vision"
- ◆ Page 3: SIE Scholarships
- ◆ Page 4: Highlights of recent projects conducted by Soroptimists
- ◆ Page 5 : Reading the past, writing the future
- ◆ Page 6: News from our Reps
- ◆ Page 7-8: Country focus—Iceland
- ◆ Pages 8-9: General News—Prizes at the GM & SIE Congress
- ◆ Page 10: General News—SI President's Appeal 2015-2017



SOROPTIMISTS INVEST IN EDUCATION



No doubt in my mind that **education is the most fundamental right** because it is at the origin of any other right. Thus it is to be defended with all our energies and it is absolutely worth the investment of our time, endeavours and funds.

Without education nobody can truly be empowered and "that nobody" could never contribute to the improvement of the world's economy nor contribute to a sustainable development.

UN women has calculated that **796 million of the world population is illiterate or lacking any significant education**. This dreadful data is even more shocking when we try to differentiate the gender educational gap. In fact, **more than half of that 796 million (or 496 million) is composed by women**.

It has been calculated that if every human being on our planet would be educated there would be no

more poverty. Furthermore **an educated population is more apt to accept and fight in favour of gender equality**. In such a world women would have shattered the crystal ceiling. They would be contributing to a sustainable development not based on quota but on an equal and fair competition with men. In such a world we would never need to specify whether the engineer, the scientist, the musician, the philosopher, the teacher, the pilot or the astronaut is a "woman" but just specify the profession. We aim at making this "dream world" become reality by 2030 and **Soroptimists know we can give a great contribution towards reaching this goal**.

In this last biennium alone, we have significantly contributed to fight illiteracy by giving books to children among others, to stimulate their reading ability and their curiosity and we helped girls to attend school on a regular base notwithstanding sanitary constraints and many more. (See the data below).

Educated women have a possibility to be to be self sufficient and to actively influence or be themselves opinion makers.



09/10 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

INTERESTING FACTS

- **1625** education projects this biennium
- Women in **STEM** sponsored by Unions & Clubs & SIE : **10** by SIE and **36** by Unions and Clubs
- **170.000** children benefitted from MBB and **€13,895** were raised
- SIE scholarship: particular attention was paid to candidates pursuing careers in the STEM / a total amount of **€107.500** was allocated to **25** beneficiaries

Examples of significant projects within SIE:

SI Club Mezitli, Turkey : 150 books were donated to the Mezitli Youth Centre Library. An amount of €900 was raised and the project counts more than 1000 beneficiaries



SI Club Gdansk, Poland; Books were donated to the external library for bookcrossing in the Osowa district of Gdansk. An amount of €500 was raised and the project counts more than 1000



beneficiaries

SI Club Neuss, Germany : Young Germans offered cultural and linguistic support to refugees and migrants to help them integrate. The project counts around 500 beneficiaries



SI Club Toamasina, Madagascar : Teachers at the Kantizaza private school were given citizenship training. The project reached 10 beneficiaries.



And these **projects** are only a **small fragment** of the great variety of **significant** and **impactful projects** our members put in place.

Soroptimists are truly efficient agents of change in their respective communities!

Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, SIE President



09/10 2017

SERIES OF "MY VISION"...



For this issue we have the testimony of SIE Vice President, Sigríd Ag

Over the past two years the Soroptimists of SIE have truly invested in education. No less than 30 of the submitted projects for the Best Practice Award were in the category **education**, representing 13 different countries, such as San Marino and Iceland, Greece, Madagascar and Kenya. We **invest** in women and girls, we empower them. We must continue along this track; to incorporate our work in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The right to attend school, particularly for girls, is still poor in many countries. The Indian politician, and former UN diplomat Shashi Tharoor wisely said: "If you educate a girl, you educate an entire community" stressing that one of every three women in the country was illiterate even today. If I had to pick the one thing we must do above all else, I now offer a two-word mantra: **educate girls**.

Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway, recently re-elected for a new 4-year term, is co-chair of the UN secretary general's MDG Advocates Group. In her speech to the UN in 2014, she claimed that **education is a powerful weapon, so let's arm young girls with it**. Statistics show that educated girls have children later and smaller families overall. They are less likely to die during pregnancy or birth, and their offspring are more likely to survive past the age of five and go on to thrive at school and in life. Women who attended school are better equipped to protect themselves and their children from malnutrition, deadly diseases, trafficking and sexual exploitation. Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

This is what we as Soroptimists do, we invest in girls and women, and we will continue to **stand up for women** in the next biennium. I look forward to serving our wonderful organization also in the next two years.

SIE SCHOLARSHIPS 2017



The latest policy paper from the UNESCO "Global Education Monitoring Report" provides us with a strong reminder that, notwithstanding the efforts in recent decades to narrow the gender gap in education, there is still a long way to go to deliver access to quality education for all. For this reason, Soroptimist continues to **Invest in Education** in many different ways and with different targets.

The SIE Scholarship Fund, established in 1968, is intended to support women who either wish to undertake further education or are going through a career change. That said, women who live in developing countries and are seeking to gain an education can also apply.

This year, the Scholarship Committee received 30 applications and—based on a number of criteria, including **Eligibility** (i.e., compliance with SIE requirements), **Presentation** (e.g., completeness of application, recommendation letters, etc.), **Accomplishments** (i.e., the inherent merit of the candidate), **Future Potential** (e.g., quality of the programme, expected results and impact, potential contribution to Soroptimist objectives)—selected 25.

The Committee focused on candidates investing in education as a life project or struggling to get into the workplace. For the second year in a row, particular attention was paid to candidates pursuing careers in the STEM areas (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), that is, in areas in which girls and women are significantly underrepresented. We can all agree with the recent remarks by UNESCO's Director-General, Irina Bokova: "The STEM gender gap disempowers girls and women and throws a shadow over entire societies, placing a break on progress to sustainable development". Indeed, the lower participation and learning achievement of girls and women in the STEM fields of study represents a major concern in many countries.

Thus, it is with pride that we can say that, out of the 25 beneficiaries of the Scholarship Fund, 14 were in the STEM areas!

In Florence, last July, the Governors approved the proposed grantees for 2017-18 and a total amount of **€107.500** was allocated to the 25 beneficiaries, with grants ranging from **€2.500 to €9.000**. Those beneficiaries were sponsored by 25 clubs in 18 countries (with 18 originating from Unions and 7 from Single Clubs). Finally, the majority of the grantees (i.e., 16 out of 25) were non-Soroptimist.

The full list of grantees is available on the SIE Website. Click [HERE](#)

Maria Luisa Frosio, SIE Scholarship Committee Chair



09/10 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

35,000 SOROPTIMISTS ARE ENGAGED IN PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY

SI Tonder, Denmark

SI Tonder is arranging meetings and convivial moments between local and foreign women. These last couple of years, lots of migrants and refugee women settled in Tonder and many of them used to be working in international firms. Soroptimists from SI Tonder are mentoring these women and organize every week Danish lessons. To give an idea of the number of women impacted:

- ◆ in 2015, **130 participated** from about 25 countries
- ◆ in 2016 around **110 women**.

The goals of these meeting are clearly to empower women, to increase their capacities to become the primary agent of their own lives and choices.



SI Union of Greece

Kassos is a remote Greek island of the Mediterranean Sea with 1000 inhabitants. The aim of the project is to improve the learning conditions of children, students and scholars.



Soroptimists from Greece have participated in installing temperature-humidity control devices in the Historical Library of Kassos, in order to conserve rare books and documents and allow scholars and students to continue using them.

With the partnership of 22 out of 30 clubs of the Greek Union, the Soroptimists fundraised the amount of money needed for the study, purchased and installed the needed devices, books and supplies for the school. The Greek Union organised a big event in one of the famous hotels in Athens, with the participation of the Kassos Association and **200 women** participated to that event.

SI Lisboa Caravela, Portugal

“We believe that no source of economic needs should derail or impede both access to university education. We consider school merit as a unique condition, which should not be frustrated or limited for economic and financial reasons.”



Following these principles, SI Caravela assigned a merit scholarship for girls to access higher education. The Club awarded a girl student with the amount of € **3,000** to follow her studies in a Medical High School for three

academic years. The Soroptimist Union of Portugal is also a sponsor of EPIS, a very well-known association, created by the former President of Portugal Cavaco Silva. It helps young students to continue their studies in spite of their families' material difficulties, while providing them with sponsors from well known Companies and organizations. SI Lisboa Caravela has prepared a plan of action with EPIS and started a first sponsorship with a Private School (OIS).

09/10 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

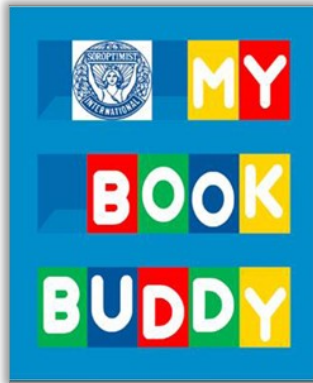
READING THE PAST, WRITING THE FUTURE

"The world has changed since 1966 – but our determination to provide every woman and man with the skills, capacities and opportunities to become everything they wish, in dignity and respect, remains as firm as ever. Literacy is a foundation to build a more sustainable future for all."

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova

This year on September 8, Unesco celebrated the 50th anniversary of UN Literacy Day.

Already 50 years the UN informs us on the need of promoting literacy and the question is of course: Are we as world population improving? This is what we learn from the UN eAtlas:



"Young women continue to lag behind young men!

Despite the progress, gender disparity in youth literacy remains persistent in almost one in five countries. In 43 countries, mainly located in Northern Africa and Western Asia, Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, young women aged 15 to 24 years are still less likely than young men to have basic reading and writing skill. This is a clear sign of the persistent challenges that continue to hold girls back."

What we have achieved so far !

As our mission is empowerment of women and girls through education and leadership, we can say that promoting literacy is really at the heart of our organisation. We read a lot of wonderful PFR's from clubs promoting literacy. And the participation in My Book Buddy, our two-year federation project during the Biennium 2015-2017, was considerable. What more can we do?

How about "Children read books for children who need books?"

This is the slogan the PD's came up with last year at the PD training in Lisbon.

The idea is that a club organises together with a school a sponsored reading event.

The sponsoring is for a school where the children have no reading books.

But more important is that it stimulates children to read and be aware of the importance of this skill for their future lives.

On our website: www.sie-mybookbuddy.org we have organised a toolbox with letters and documents to support you in organising reading events. And we love to publish your events on the website news page so we inspire each other with our activities.

For us a very inspiring action is what has been done in Austria, please take your time to read their PFR: [SIE-10958](#).

And how about following Austria in their achievement to have as many children supported to have access to books as they have members!

This in line with the overall ambition of our president Elisabetta to have 34.000 girls supported with access to books in her biennium, the same amount as we have members in SIE at the moment.



We are very proud on the results until now, but so many clubs came up with applications for schools that we hope that the sponsored reading events, so called **BOOKATHLONS**, will stay as an ongoing

activity of Soroptimist clubs – contributing to making gender equality in literacy a reality

For more, please click [HERE](#)

SIE Programme team:
Marlène van Benthem
Caroline Junier
Bintou Koïta



09/10 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

ADVOCACY—NEWS FROM OUR REPS

EDUCATION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE



No, the Council of Europe is not really concerned with education per se.

But let's take a closer look. Isn't the **process of memorizing information for future use a kind of self-education?** And why shouldn't we all feel concerned?

Take, for example, an article about alcohol consumption. Baby boomers were warned about drugs, but no one said that alcohol was a comparable threat. Today's young people stay sober without being stigmatized. This is education, too.



And in terms of the CoE, **we need to learn about participating in political processes as well!**

This Programme and Advocacy Newsletter is about education. When I was asked to write about the Council of Europe, I could only think of the usual topics like fighting illiteracy or teaching migrants the language of their new country. It would have been a boring article containing the usual facts. So, I decided **to take a completely different approach**, namely a very personal one:

Being a regular participant at the Council of Europe opens up new perspectives for our Soroptimist mission. I have realized that we should know more

about the support we can get from the laws of our countries and from the politicians who implement these laws and who ask for help from NGOs like ours. So I decided to organize a high-level visit to the Council of Europe, designed to focus on **women's issues and how NGOs and politics can interact**. As German speakers are the biggest group in SIE, it will be a German group. The quota was quickly filled. As the official part of the event finishes at around 1 pm, I also planned a meal afterwards at a near-by restaurant. In addition, SI Club Strasbourg invited the guests to a get-together on the evening before, and SI Germany is managing the list of participants. I am really grateful to both for their support. So there will also be time to enjoy Soroptimist friendship.

However, I was quite disappointed when one Soroptimist cancelled her participation because we are unable to offer a vegetarian meal. The focus of the event is **education, our own education about human rights in Europe and how to participate in political processes to strengthen the rights of women**. It is not a social event like a club charter or a club anniversary, where the participants are guests and where club members can tend to special requests. I wonder if we have forgotten that the most important mission of SI is to **promote the rights of women** and that enjoying our friendship is a wonderful side-effect.



Bettina Hahne, SIE Representative to the CoE



09/10 2017

COUNTRY FOCUS

ICELAND



SI Iceland has 600 members in 19 clubs. Many of the 19 clubs have projects that focus on *Education*. I proudly share with you five of them. Because of good results all of the projects are ongoing.

Club Kópavogur: Supporting single mothers

This project involves supporting young single mothers in the town of Kópavogur to have a better life and helping them build a strong self-image. It reinforces them to gain more education and courage to engage in social activities that fall within their area of interest and ability.

The Communities Welfare Department in consultation with the Club board have chosen eight single and struggling mothers to participate in the project.



District Court Attorney Lilja Bjarnadóttir, mediator and experienced mentor, held diverse seminars for the girls twice a month for a few months. The seminars helped

them approach the objective e.g. self-training, communication, financial literacy and learning technology. The Club also sponsored the girls to further their education by paying tuition fees, books or any way that best fits their need. Four of the eight girls who participated in the project continued their education and the other four landed good jobs after their participation in the project.

Club Reykjavík: Helping mentally ill mothers

The aim of this project was to provide educational support to mentally ill mothers with children aged 2-5 years old. No mentoring programmes were available for this group.

The club assisted in establishing and financing the educational and mentoring programme. The aim

was to help mothers and their children to reconnect after the mother had been hospitalized for some time. The mothers were given advice, practical tools and guidance in rebuilding their ties to their young children, thereby regaining their trust in order to be able to support the children and nurture them.

The project was carried out in collaboration with a local rehabilitation organisation and the National Hospital, where the mothers were treated during their illness. Through these contacts we were able to locate a qualified teacher, who planned the successful programme.

Club Vid Húnaflóa: Girls can do everything



All 11 years old girls in the small county of Húnavatnssýsla in Northwest Iceland are invited to a complimentary weekend-long course. Teaching, food, housing and of course good entertainment are all included.



The teacher, Kristin Tómasdóttir, a well-known Icelandic writer, has a long experience in teaching courses like this. She uses her books as a base for the courses, since they all handle the subject of empowering girls.

The course's aim is to teach the young girls to understand what 'self-esteem' is, to know their own self-image and to learn positive ways to build their self-esteem.

09/10 2017

COUNTRY FOCUS ICELAND



Club Seltjarnnes: A step towards a better future

This project was started in 2011 by a registered nurse, a twelve-week integrative programme for survivors of violence (sexual, physical and/or emotional), with follow-up for one year. Participants are women, diagnosed with anxiety disorder, depression or PTSD. The aim of the programme is to improve the mental and physical well being of these women and empower them to return to active daily life which many have avoided for years.

The programme emphasizes education and group therapy, one-on-one consultations, yoga, physical exercises, treatment, body awareness and self-image support.

Research conducted on the effectiveness of the programme confirmed that it improves women's health in terms of anxiety, depression and symptoms of PTSD. Many of them have returned to school or found employment. The programme has proved its value and has now been recognized by the Icelandic National Health.

Club Akureyri: Training-fund for mentors

The project supports training-funds for mentors for a local organization that aims to help victims of sexual- and domestic abuse.

The program is funded and run by former victims of abuse, who use their experience to help others. The mentors are sponsored to receive the education needed to be able to help with all the complex problems that may occur in these situations. The mentors both guide victims through a 24/7 open phone line and by welcoming them to their local facilities.

Laufey G. Baldursdóttir, President Union of Iceland

GENERAL NEWS—PRIZES AT THE GM



PHOTO COMPETITION 2017

The fourth edition of the SIE Photo Competition entitled *Through the Eyes of Soroptimists* saw submissions coming from Austria, Israel, Madagascar, Dubai, Romania and a number of other countries where SIE is present and active. An impressive success!

Selecting the winners was no easy task, but using a set of predetermined criteria, each member of the Jury independently evaluated all the submissions. So, having announced the Winners at the Governors'

Meeting in Florence, we are now proud to give their names to the world!

Promoting education in the field of STEM:

1st prize : "Veterinary Students women power" by Valentina Kubale Dvojmoc (Club of Celje, Slovenia)

• 2nd prize : *La "Yzaline sur chantier 1"* by Marianne Mukankaka (Club of Gisenyi, Rwanda)

Promoting empowerment of women and girls:

• 1st prize : "La jeune fille puisant de l'eau" by Bintou Diane-Konate (Club of Bamako Espoir, Mali)

• 2nd prize : "Cours d'alphabétisation pour autonomiser les femmes à Mboro au Sénégal" by Yvette Foubert (Club of La Rochelle, France)

• 2nd prize : "L'autonomisation par le biais de la couture" by Josiane Ralambotsirofo (Club of Antananarivo-Doyen, Madagascar)

The Jury composed was composed of Caroline Junier, Communication Officer Christine Cromwell-Ahrens, European Women's Lobby Representative Renate Smith Kubat and the winners of the 2016 Photo Competition Machtelt van der Straeten and Villy Makou.

For more, please click [HERE](#)



09/10 2017

PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS

GENERAL NEWS— PRIZES AT THE CONGRESS

SIE PEACE PRIZE 2017

Florence, 16 July 2017 – Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) has awarded its 2017 Peace Prize to Gégé Katana Bukuru of the Democratic Republic of Congo for her remarkable and courageous commitment to the fight for the women’s rights in her war-torn country for over a quarter of a century. She has remained steadfast in her efforts despite death threats, arbitrary arrests, robbery and the systematic looting of her belongings and the inability to travel for almost ten years. This year’s prizewinner was announced at the 21st SIE Congress, held in Florence, Italy, and attended by over 800 women from all over the world. As a symbol of her achievements, Gégé also received the Peace Prize statue, made by artist Bettina Scholl-Sabbatini . For more, please click [HERE](#)



opening the Suzanne Noël centre for female victims of domestic violence in partnership with the ASERC (Socio-Educational Association of the Cognac region).



The Vocational Training & Employment Support Centre for Women (KIMIM), initiated by SI Club Etiler, Turkey, was selected as the year’s best ‘Educate to Lead’ project for

its effort to help unemployed women in an area of Istanbul with particularly high unemployment. Among other things, they introduced vocational training and coaching, thus securing jobs for 20 women.

To see the full list of winners for each Objective, please click [HERE](#)

SIE “WOMEN IN SPORT” PRIZE



At the initiative of several clubs, SIE has introduced the Women in Sports Prize as a pilot project in 2017.

It recognizes women as role models and also promotes equal opportunities in sports, where gender inequality is still widespread. Through the idea of “mens sana in corpore sano” and with this Prize, SIE hopes to raise awareness of the importance, for women and girls and for the community at large, of sports and activity to enhance physical and mental health, wellness and quality of life.

Two donations from clubs in Italy and Finland (€1000 and €1500, respectively) augmented the funding, thus allowing SIE to award €6000 in total. Therefore, prizes of €2000 have been presented to winners in the following three categories:

- ◆ Rhythmic Gymnastics Athlete: Alexandra Ana Maria Agiurgiuculese
- ◆ Football Team: Soma Zafer Sport Girls’ Football Team
- ◆ Football Coach: Cecilia Andrén Nyström

To read more about it and discover the winners, please click [HERE](#)

SIE BEST PRACTICE AWARDS 2017

The winners of the 2017 Best Practice Awards were announced at the 21st SIE Congress in Florence on 16th July 2017.

The project achieving the highest overall score by jurors was crowned ‘Project of the Year’. This year that prize went to SI Club Cognac, France, for



09/10 2017

GENERAL NEWS

SI PRESIDENT 2015-2017 APPEAL TO TRAIN FUTURE LEADERS: NEPAL

The Appeal of Yvonne Simpson, SI President 2015-2017, to finance projects giving Nepalese women and girls access to education and leadership is drawing to a close. It's now time to give you the results.

In the spring of 2015 Nepal was devastated by earthquakes compounded by destructive aftershocks. Whenever natural disasters occur, particularly in Nepal, women pay a very heavy price with equally devastating consequences such as, among others: an increase in trafficking of women and prostitution, education is restricted to boys, the international aid effort is concentrated on urban areas. Communication channels need to be rebuilt and rural areas remain particularly badly hit. The SI President approached various organizations seeking funding for sustainable projects in rural areas to support women and girls to rebuild their lives with the emphasis on education and leadership. The targets set at the launch on 12 December 2015: raise €365,000 (£320,000) across the 4 federations and provide support for 1,000 women and girls.

At this almost final stage, we are pleased to inform you that **the objectives have been more than met.**

13 projects are under implementation and two are in the feasibility stage. They concern over **6,500 women and girls in Nepalese rural and mountainous regions.** Covering a variety of areas, they aim to work towards, or 100% acquire female autonomy through education: distribution of computers, courses for teachers on gender equality, training of seamstresses and booksellers,



Women of the Tharu village learning computer skills

reconstruction of a dormitory for girls, provision of scholarships, uniforms and school supplies, contribution to a shelter for women and girl victims of human trafficking, manufacture of recyclable sanitary towels, construction of school classrooms, showers with WC, and also the installation of a kitchen for preserving vegetables, and even training of female trekking guides. See www.soroptimistinternational.org.

Donations collected across **the four federations stood at €397,000** (£350,000) on June 30; the latest donations yet to be added. As at August 30, **the amount raised by the Unions and clubs of the Federation of Europe amounted to €163,171.**



In October 2017, at the close of the SI President 2015-2017 Appeal: Nepal, the Committee will continue to follow the projects up to their final implementation.

These results are incredible! **Our heartfelt congratulations to everyone, and an especially big thank you to all the Soroptimists in the Federation of Europe!** Thanks to your generosity, together with that of the other federations, the SI 2015-2017 project will bring about a change for the better for a great many Nepalese women and girls.

*Caroline Junier
SIE Assistant Programme Director
Member of the President's Appeal Committee 2015-2017*

IMPORTANT DATES

- Oct 15** International Day of Rural Women
 - Nov 25** International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women *
 - Dec 10** Human Rights Day
- * *The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign which takes place each year and runs from 25 November to 10 December*

CONTRIBUTORS

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- Laufey Baldursdóttir**, President of SI Iceland
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PROGRAMME & ADVOCACY NEWS