



Advocacy Resource Pack

**62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of
Women**

**Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender
equality and the empowerment of rural women and
girls**

12 - 23 March 2018

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Welcome to the Soroptimist International Advocacy Resource Pack. This pack should equip you with key information to support you in your Soroptimist advocacy work at CSW62, making it possible for Soroptimists to speak with a global voice for women and girls. Please keep this with you whilst you attend events and meet with members of other organisations. All the positions in this pack are based on the grassroots expertise of Soroptimist clubs from across the world, and are founded on the mission of Soroptimist International, to transform the lives and status of women and girls through education, empowerment and enabling opportunities.

To help your understanding of SI's position:

- Understand, and read further about SI's Key 'Asks' (on pages 3-8) so that you can speak to others about them;
- Familiarise yourself with SI's positions with 'Where We Stand' statements (on page 9);
- Take any opportunity offered to attend meetings with your country mission or arrange to meet with a representative before you arrive in New York;
- Talk to other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and gain their support for SI's 'Asks'. You may be able to reciprocate their demands;
- Attend the Regional Caucus Group meetings for your country;
- Keep in touch with other members of the SI delegation;
- Read related reports to the main and review theme (on pages 11-12).

On September 2015, countries adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of seventeen aspirational 'Global Goals' with 169 targets between them, officially known as Transforming our world: 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', to be achieved by 2030. On page 3 you will find an infographic of the 17 SDGs. The work of SI over the coming years will focus on implementation of the SDGs with like-minded civil society organisations and UN bodies, particularly focusing on SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation. Take time to familiarise yourself with the SDGs, more information can be found [here](#). In this pack, after each of SI's Key 'Asks' you will see a list of targets and which SDGs they relate to.

We do hope that you will find this Advocacy Resource Pack useful, both before and during CSW62. Please use the information to guide your inputs and as a reference point for your own perspective as a Soroptimist and for your knowledge of Soroptimist projects.

As Soroptimists, we must ensure that the voices of women and girls across the world are listened to and their needs and opinions heard. We call on governments to act to educate, empower and enable women and girls. We must all continue to look at the world through women's eyes.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Soroptimist International's Asks

SI's six key asks are related to the main theme 'Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls'

(i) Recognise the disproportionate negative impact climate change has on rural women and the intersections of climate change and other drivers of inequality

The adverse effects of climate change are inextricably linked to human rights. Multiple [reviews and studies](#) identify and describe the risks climate change pose to the rights to water, food security, highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, life and physical integrity, adequate housing, sanitation, self-determination, and sustainable development. The rights of rural [women and girls are especially threatened](#) by the adverse effects of climate change.

Training programmes and capacity-building that target rural women and girls and support their role in implementing climate mitigation and adaptation policy, give them an awareness of what climate

change is and how to adapt one’s life to a changing environment, which in turn gives women and girls power to recognise and choose options that improve their situation.

Natural disasters disproportionately worsen the earnings and employment opportunities of women. Livelihoods may be lost in a single disastrous event; however, the insidious creep of temperature, precipitation, or sea level may present circumstances that slowly steal employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Rural women that have been displaced due to climate change or a natural disaster, are also particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Educational programmes should equip women and girls with knowledge, skills, and flexibility to move to new or different employment or entrepreneurial opportunities as circumstances change.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 1	1.4, 1.5, 1.A
SDG 2	2.1, 2.3, 2.4
SDG 4	4.3, 4.4, 4.5
SDG 5	5.5, 5.A, 5.B, 5.C
SDG 6	6.4
SDG 13	13.3, 13.B
SDG 16	16.7

(ii) Invest in water infrastructure, ensuring the full and meaningful participation of rural women

Rural women and girls, particularly in developing countries, are the most water insecure. They are predominately responsible for fetching clean drinking water for the family, getting water to grow vegetables, caring for family members who are ill due to drinking dirty water, taking care of waste or waste water.

Equitable access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is recognised as an integral component of the realisation of all human rights. The advantages of adopting and using clean water and sanitation are clear: improved health, privacy, convenience, and safety. For women and girls, the availability of household sanitation reduces the risk of rape and or attack experienced when traveling to public latrines or the bush to defecate. For girls, the provision of school sanitation facilities means that they are less likely to miss school by [staying at home during menstruation](#).

Women are key stakeholders in water policies and programmes. However, they are not always recognised as such. Training programmes, including new technology, and capacity-building that target women and support their role in implementing water and sanitation policy should give women and girls an awareness of the benefits of good water, sanitation, and hygiene, and of how to adapt one’s life to include sanitation and hygiene, which in turn gives women and girls power to recognise and chose options that improve their situation.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 1	1.4, 1.5, 1.A
SDG 2	2.1, 2.3, 2.4
SDG 4	4.3, 4.4, 4.5
SDG 5	5.5, 5.A, 5.B, 5.C
SDG 6	6.1, 6.2, 6.B
SDG 7	7.1
SDG 8	8.2, 8.3
SDG 12	12.2, 12.4
SDG 13	13.3, 13.B
SDG 14	14.1
SDG 16	16.7

(iii) Implement land tenure reforms in a gender-equitable manner

Rural women play a vital role in agricultural production, a critical component of food security; however, they are unable to reach their full potential due to discriminatory norms, policies and laws. Women are less likely to own their own land; property laws discriminate against women inheriting family property, widows are discarded in their rights to inherit from their deceased husband, and custom and patriarchal social norms often favour male relatives. These barriers threaten rural women’s food security, forcing them to migrate to urban areas searching for other livelihoods. Discriminatory laws and policies which prevent women throughout the life-course from controlling their productive resources, lock them in a cycle of poverty and prevent them from being economically empowered.

Women’s land tenure rights needs to be protected and promoted, ensuring it is legally [recognised and guaranteed by law](#), whether or not they are recognised by religious systems, by family members or by a woman’s community and its leaders. International normative frameworks must guarantee women the right to own, inherit, bequeath, manage and profit from land. States must ensure women are fully informed of their land rights and provide access to mechanisms through which they can assert these rights. Enhancing women’s land and property rights is directly linked to the realisation of many other development objectives; poverty alleviation, food security, and environmental sustainability.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 1	1.4
SDG 5	5.5, 5.A
SDG 16	16.7

(iv) Investing in the inclusion of women in agriculture

Agriculture is the single largest employment source globally, and represents 80 percent of the worlds working poor, more than [400 million women](#) work in agriculture, and [98 million](#) girls and boys are child labourers. Poverty within a family is the driving force for child labourers, with many girls facing the double burden of performing household chores within their own households combined with agricultural activities, such as sowing, harvesting and livestock holdings.

Due to lack of viable opportunities, more young men are leaving rural areas for employment in the cities, or abroad. Furthermore, war, sickness, death from HIV/AIDS have led to women are working in the fields and more households are headed by women. Due to women’s lower literacy levels, and lower likelihood of owning her own land, this leaves women in a very vulnerable position, at a time when she has heightened responsibility. Most land reform programmes target the “head of the household” which is frequently defined as a man, thus excluding female headed households from any support programmes and financial credit.

Although rural women labour rights are covered through [ILO conventions](#), [CEDAW](#), as well as specific conventions relating to women workers and rural workers; these include equal remuneration for work of equal value, social protection, and the right to form unions. In reality, rural women do not benefit from these rights. Older rural women, particularly need special protection as many of them have never “worked” outside the family business or household. Governments must ensure the necessary conditions are in place to support the self-reliance of older people and create conditions that promote a healthy and productive life that enable them to work and live independently in their own communities as long as possible or as desired. This includes developing systems of health care as well as systems of economic and social security in older age and, where appropriate, paying special attention to the needs of women. Governments must develop security systems that ensure greater inter-generational and intra-generational equity and solidarity and that provide long term support and services for growing numbers of frail older people.

Investing in the inclusion of women in agriculture is a vital step towards meeting the challenges of food production in the future. Women are lifelong agents of change in their families, [typically investing 90 percent](#) of their earnings into their families and communities compared to 35% by men, thus more likely to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 1	1.1, 1.2
SDG 2	2.3
SDG 5	5.4, 5.A, 5.C
SDG 6	6.3, 6.4, 6.A, 6.B
SDG 8	8.3, 8.5, 8.7
SDG 10	10.3

(v) Engaging the entire community to transform gender-based violence and discrimination

Globally, at least [200 million](#) girls and women alive today have undergone some form of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM). This practice is rooted in gender inequality, myths and cultural beliefs, for many rural women, FGM is also a matter of livelihood. Traditional birth attendants, who typically double up as female circumcisers, must be sensitised to the harm caused by FGM and helped in finding alternative employment opportunities for those who carry out the practice as a means of survival.

Engaging men and boys in transforming harmful customs and beliefs in relation to child and early marriage, violence against women, rigid notions of masculinity and stereotyping is essential for achieving gender equality in rural communities. As men still largely control resources and social discourse in many rural communities, it is critical to acknowledge men’s roles as gatekeepers of gender norms and therefore likely preventers of change. Traditional social obligations, religious beliefs and the silent culture between the sexes are often major obstacles for change. If male members of the family are educated on gender equality, they can learn about the benefits not only for women but for all members of society. With men and boys’ active participation, then harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, FGM, and other forms of discrimination can end, thus not only benefiting the whole community but also contributing to implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in terms of gender equality.

Traditional elders and religious leaders must be educated on gender equality and the positive implications for the families and communities; particularly, they must be made aware of the negative consequences of FGM as they have the potential to play a key role in speaking out against the practice FGM, and instead promote ‘Alternative Rights of Passage’. Acknowledging the great disparity of attitudes towards FGM between those living in rural and urban areas, community leaders need to work with families and women’s coalitions to influence traditional elders.

Women’s groups and social movements provide an inclusive environment which encourages and facilitates safe and open participation of women and girls at all ages. Through these groups, gender-based violence and discrimination in rural areas can be tackled.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 4	4.3.
SDG 5	5.1, 5.3, 5.C
SDG 10	10.3
SDG 16	16.1, 16.2, 16.7

(vi) Ensuring adequate investment in the collection of disaggregated data is used to monitor gender equality

Global initiatives designed to benefit the daily lives of people everywhere risk not being implemented appropriately, if at all, unless they are regularly monitored and accounted for. To measure whether rural women and girls benefit from sustainable development efforts, it is critical to have accurate and reliable information through qualitative and quantitative indicators – showing not only women’s involvement but also if their arguments were heard, implemented and incorporated. For knowledge about the status of rural women and girls to be accurate, it is important that gender and age differentiated statistics and indicators are collected nationally, regionally and globally to measure gender gaps at each life stage and adjust development programmes to rectify inequalities. At a minimum, data should be disaggregated based on age, sex, marital status, geography, income, disability, race and ethnicity and other factors relevant to monitoring inequalities (including multiple inequalities experienced by women and girls) as stated in SDG target 17.18.

Although some indicators are measured by household (not by individual), it remains important that the data collected for those indicators is disaggregated. It is essential to know how the household is comprised, for example if a woman is alone raising her children or an older widow, this can often prematurely allow poverty and abuse to prevail. Without this information it will be difficult to properly and fully identify the gaps and challenges facing women and girls’ empowerment as part of sustainable development.

Without mandated and obligatory follow-up and review processes, there is a risk that the voices of women and girls will go unheard, systematically and in all sectors. The voluntary nature of reporting on progress provides countries with the option not to follow-up or review the implementation of the SDGs at all, or to be selective in their review. Actions undertaken by the private sector contributing to the SDGs must also be accountable, as often their own interests do not prioritise the needs of vulnerable and marginalised people.

How this key ask relates to the SDGs:

SDG	Targets
SDG 2	2.2, 2.3
SDG 3	3.2
SDG 4	4.5
SDG 5	5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.A, 5.B
SDG 6	6.2
SDG 7	7.3
SDG 8	8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8, 8.9
SDG 9	9.3
SDG 10	10.1, 10.6, 10.7, 10.B
SDG 11	11.2, 11.7
SDG 14	14.7
SDG 16	16.1, 16.2, 16.7, 16.9
SDG 17	17.8

SI Where We Stand Statements

SI's Where We Stand statements are agreed position papers which present the intersections between the SDGs, gender and the thematic area. The position papers present key actions to be taken and are designed to help all Soroptimists take the same position when they are lobbying others. Please click [here](#) to view current statements.

Written Statements for CSW

Written statements are submitted to the CSW Secretariat online in October 2017. Here is SI's written statement for CSW62:

[Soroptimist International's CSW62 Written Statement](#)

To view the positions of other organisations, please click [here](#).

Working towards Agreed Conclusions

Each year, the principal output of CSW is the Agreed Conclusions on the priority themes set. This document contains an analysis of the priority theme and a set of concrete recommendations for governments, intergovernmental bodies and other institutions, civil society actors and other relevant stakeholders, to be implemented at the international, national, regional and local level. The Agreed Conclusions will help develop how gender equality will be included in development efforts moving forward.

Negotiations on the Agreed Conclusion text by member state (government) representatives will have started several weeks before CSW. SI has formed a writing group to review, analyse and make recommendations to government representatives. By influencing government representatives, it is possible to improve and develop what commitments are made in the document. NGOs endeavour to maintain text which has been agreed in previous years or is contained within existing UN Resolutions or agreements. This will safeguard women's rights on some of those contentious issues.

If you wish to join this writing group, particularly if you are attending CSW for the second week, as this is when the main negotiations take place, please inform Advocacy Manager, Caroline Mulligan caroline.mulligan@soroptimistinternational.org.

You can read previous Agreed Conclusions: [CSW61](#) [CSW60](#)

CSW62 Review theme

Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women

In the last twenty years have seen dramatic changes in this field: in 1995 only 1% of the world population had access to the internet, in 2015, it was estimated that about [3.2 billion people](#), or almost half of the world's population, were online. Those that are not online are disproportionately poor, rural, older and female, and the gap between them and those who have access to the internet is widening steadily.

The [gender digital divide](#) refers to the measurable gap between women and men in their access to, use of and ability to influence, contribute to and benefit from information and communication technologies (ICTs). Women are inhibited from accessing ICT due to affordability – women have less access to resources; legislation or discriminatory practices which affect women; education – illiteracy and lack of digital literacy; and security – harassment faced by women online. Despite an increasingly globalised communication system, where technological advances have helped transcend national boundaries and impact on individuals' behaviours and attitudes, as well as public policy, women continue to be seriously under-represented in ICT companies. [Some statistics](#) showing as few as 23 per cent female employees, and the percentage is even lower for women in leadership positions or technical roles.

Despite decades of legislation in many countries stating pay should be equal for men and women, there still persists a pay gap. [Iceland](#) recently became the first country in the world to make it illegal for companies to pay men and women differently, with those failing to demonstrate pay equality facing fines. This pay gap includes women in the media; in 2017, it was revealed there was a stark contrast between male and female salaries within the [British Broadcasting Company \(BBC\)](#).

Furthermore, when often when women are portrayed in the media, their views about social, economic or political matters are rarely the focus. Instead, when they are featured, they tend to be hyper-sexualised, with women more likely to appear in sexually revealing clothing or be nude onscreen than male character. The media offers the potential to make a significant contribution to the advancement of women, through increasing the number of diverse female leaders, role models and protagonists on screen. Media which is more balanced and representative of society, inspires young girls and women everywhere as well as fostering a more inclusive society.

Technological advances offer communication to a wider range of audiences, and to wider range of sources of material, however this has also led to the proliferation of cyber bullying, abuse, pornographic, violent and other sexist material on the internet. The increase in negative and degrading images of women reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and holds back the advancement and empowerment of women.

Educating youth, especially girls, on the risks of cyber abuses, ways to protect themselves and services that can assist those who experience cyber abuse is key. It must be acknowledged that

cyber mobbing and bullying causes psychological harm: victims can lose their self-confidence, become anxious and/or depressed and often refuse or are too afraid to go to school or work and continue with daily activities. Specified gender and age sensitive training and information should be provided in schools and work places and disaggregated data by sex and age on all forms of abuse perpetuated through information technologies, especially sexual abuse should be collected.

Useful acronyms that you should know

- Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)
- Business and Industry Non-Governmental Organisation (BINGO)
- Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
- Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)
- Conference of the Parties (COP)
- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)
- Expert Group Meeting (EGM)
- High Level Political Forum (HLPF)
- Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
- Kyoto Protocol (KP)
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education (STEM)
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
- UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- Women's Human Rights (WHR)
- Voluntary National Report (VNR)

Further reading can be found at:

[Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas](#), United Nations Report of the Secretary General, 2017

[Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the CSW 62 Priority Theme: Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls](#), UN Women, 2017

[The Global Risks Report 2018](#), World Economic Forum, 2018

[Towards a Pollution-Free Planet](#), United Nations Environment, 2017

[Promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective](#), United Nations, 2017

[Turbulent Waters: Pursuing Water Security in Fragile Contexts](#), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2017

[Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene](#), World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017

[Balancing the Pillars: Eradicating Poverty, Protecting the Planet and Promoting Shared Prosperity](#), Together 2030 and World Vision International, 2017

[Women, Food, Land: Exploring Rule of Law Linkages using Law to Strengthen Food Security and Land Rights for Women](#), International Development Law Organisation, 2017

[General Recommendation no. 34 on the Rights of Rural Women](#), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, 2016

[Gender-Responsive Climate Policy – Entry Points](#), Women's Environment and Development Organisation, 2017

[The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017](#), United Nations 2017