

Soroptimist International Oral Statement 21 March 2018

Soroptimist International advocates education as a powerful driver of sustainable development and a critical tool for empowering individuals and their communities, especially in rural areas. When implementing the sustainable development goals, a unified and integrated approach is required due to the cross-cutting nature of the goals, especially in relation to gender equality.

Rural women and girls are often unable to access education due to an array of underlying root causes, which must be tackled through clear policies and commitments from government institutions, working hand in hand with CSO/ NGOs, who, are often able to provide situation specific educational interventions in challenging and remote situations.

As men largely control resources and social discourse in many rural communities, it is critical to acknowledge the crucial role they play in the empowerment of rural women and girls. Rigid notions of stereotypes must be addressed through targeted interventions on the importance of educating women, and the positive implications this can have for their families and communities.

Rural communities are increasingly being affected by the impacts of encroaching urban development, and through the loss of their younger generations to more developed areas. This shift in demographic distribution has a significant impact on the accessibility of education, therefore, targeted, gender sensitive strategies should also be put in place to fund

rural women's and girls' access to education and acknowledge previous acquired competences. To achieve this, the following actions are recommended:

- Direct financial services, support and credit, to empower rural girls to continue their education and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities; and to facilitate female teachers;
- Develop livelihood enhancing initiatives through access to technical and non-traditional (secondary) vocational education and life skills training, including financial, digital and legal literacy for all women and girls throughout the lifecycle;
- Eradicate discriminatory or patriarchal economic practices which limit rural women from formal education and experiential learning.

Education contributes to the independence, autonomy, self-sustainability, and economic and social empowerment of women and girls, and is one of the most effective tools for alleviating the multi-layered challenges faced by women in rural communities. Without access to quality, safe, inclusive and life-course education and training, rural women and girls of all ages will not be equal participants and contributors to society at every level.