



Intersecting Crises

How Soroptimist International is lifting women and girls out of poverty around the world

UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF) REPORT 2024

Submitted by Soroptimist International

Contents



Introduction.....	4
Role of United Nations High-Level Political Forum.....	5
Executive Summary	6
A Word from Soroptimist International President Puan Sri Siew Yong Gnanalingam.....	7
SDG 1 (End Poverty)	8
SIGBI – Goat Distribution for Income Generation, Nepal	9
SIA – Live Your Dream Awards, United States of America.....	10
Key Recommendations (SDG 1).....	11
SDG 2 (End Hunger)	12
SISEAP – Sustainable Food Security for Rural Communities, Malaysia.....	13
SIAF – Agriculture for Empowerment, Democratic Republic of Congo.....	14
SIE – Moving the World to End Hunger, Burkina Faso	15
SIGBI – Bingley Community Kitchen, United Kingdom	16
Key Recommendations (SDG 2)	17
SDG 13 (Combat Climate Change)	18
SISEAP – Restoration Sustainability, Mongolia	19
SIE – CommuniTree Reforestation, Nicaragua	20
SIAF – Greening Kibera Roadsides Initiative, Kenya	21
If Not Now, When?	22
Key Recommendations (SDG 13).....	23
SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).....	24



Soroptimist International Foundation – Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal, Malawi. . . .	25
SIA – Ending Child Marriage, Cameroon	26
Peace Means Freedom From Violence	27
Key Recommendations (SDG 16).	28
SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).	29
Commonwealth Business Women’s Network.	30
Women for Water Partnership	31
Every Woman Treaty	32
Soroptimist International Foundation – Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal, Georgia. . .	33
A Future to Live For?	34
Key Recommendations (SDG 17).	35
Recommendations (Full List)	36
Implementing Recommendations	38
Human Rights-based Approach	38
Gender Mainstreaming.	38
Gender Disaggregated Data	39
Gender Responsive Budgeting	39
Conclusion	40
Acknowledgements	41
List of References	41

Contents

Introduction

Soroptimist International is a grassroots membership organisation advocating for the rights of all women and girls.

Engaging with our almost 65,000 members across 118 countries, Soroptimist International uses education as a catalyst to support women and girls, in all their diversity, to reach their full potential by enabling and empowering them with the tools required to do so. Through equitable opportunities and lifelong learning, all women and girls can have an equal voice in developing strong and peaceful communities worldwide.



Role of United Nations High-Level Political Forum



The 2024 theme for the United Nations High-Level Political Forum is “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

This theme is particularly important for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review during the 2024 High-Level Political Forum: Goals 1 (End Poverty), 2 (End Hunger), 13 (Combat Climate Change), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Soroptimist International demands that this 2024 High-Level Political Forum review not merely be pro forma, but that it actively considers what might make it more effective, more action-oriented and accelerate the ever-closing chance to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

This requires political determination, cooperation, and the willingness to work with the United Nations’ Major Groups and other Stakeholders to completely overhaul and dismantle the structural barriers that continuously discriminate against women and girls, in all their diversity.



Executive Summary

Soroptimist International recognises that rates of poverty globally have exponentially increased as a result of intersecting crises.

We also recognise that women and girls – in all their diversity – are among those most impacted. Poverty and gender inequality are, however, not inevitable. Rather, they are the result of structural discrimination which has been at the heart of law and policy for decades. In line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/235 on Women in Development, United Nations Member States must actively work to meaningfully and equitably involve women at all levels of decision making and ensure that all efforts are taken to tackle structural barriers and discrimination that continue to prevent women and girls from pursuing such opportunities.

Drawing upon the SDGs under review during the 2024 High-Level Political Forum, this report seeks to highlight how Soroptimist International is working from the grassroots to the international level to eradicate poverty and achieve gender equality. It will also draw on current gaps in international law and policy, including gender mainstreaming, financing for development, and the need for access to quality, disaggregated data.

Achieving gender equality is essential to eradicating poverty. Yet, according to The Gender Snapshot 2023 report, “if current trends continue, over 340 million women and girls – an estimated eight per cent of the world’s female population – will live in extreme poverty by 2030, and close to one in four will experience moderate or severe insecurity”.

The global community has just six years to achieve this milestone Agenda, yet we find ourselves at a vital crossroads. It is now more critical than ever to work in partnerships as a collective global community with a vision for a sustainable, green, equal, and peaceful future. The SDGs will only be achieved through effective partnership and collaboration between Member States, civil society and other stakeholders.



A Word from Soroptimist International President Puan Sri Siew Yong Gnanalingam



My heartfelt plea “Save Mother Earth, Save the Future” is a call to Soroptimists to work in the areas of climate change to ensure a thriving future for all women and girls who are disproportionately impacted by poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), climate change (SDG 13), peace and strong institutions (SDG 16), and partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

By safeguarding our planet’s resources and biodiversity, we strive to ensure a sustainable world for all women and girls and for all future generations. Every action counts: every tree planted, every voice raised for justice, and every effort to build a world where no one is left behind.



Let’s work towards a harmonious future where nature’s beauty is cherished, poverty is eradicated, and towards a world where there is no war, and sustainable peace becomes our guiding principle.



SDG 1 (End Poverty)



In 2022, an estimated **388 million women and girls** were living in extreme poverty (1 in every 10 women), compared with 372 million men and boys.

This equates to more than 70 million people – or 10 per cent of the global population – that are surviving on less than USD 1.90 per day. The intersection of social, economic, climate and legal inequalities imposes the heaviest penalties on women and girls.

Soroptimist International's strategy to advance the rights of all women and girls everywhere is to "educate, empower, and enable" them. Soroptimist International's work at the grassroots level has demonstrated that economic empowerment is a key driver to helping all women and girls break out of cycles of poverty.



SIGBI – Goat Distribution for Income Generation, Nepal

SI Kathmandu, Nepal, of Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland, has run its Goat Distribution for Income Generation programme since 2017.



A recipient of the Goats Distribution programme in Nepal cradles one of her baby goats.

The goal of this project is to enhance the socio-economic empowerment of marginalised women by providing them access to interest-free loans, and to enhance the entrepreneurial capacities of marginalised women by providing them with access to business and income-generating opportunities through interest-free loans.

The Club selected 51 marginalised women from two different locations – Nagarkot

and Sindhupalchock – who were given baby goats to start their small businesses or income-generating activities. The women were selected based on their background (single, ethnically marginalised, low economic and employment status), as well as their prospective business ideas. The selected women were asked to use the goats to start their own small business, which was related to starting goat farming using the sales of goat meat to generate an income.

TESTIMONIAL



Bimala, one beneficiary of the programme, said “I was [once] hopeless because of the financial crisis in my family... I was not in the position to send my children to school [nor] to provide them with quality food and clothes. But now I rear three goats, and from them I have a good income. I am sending my children to school and spending happy times with my family.”

This goat distribution project in remote areas of Nepal has helped families like Bimala’s to not only break out of poverty but find a self-sustaining income that enables her family to access education and nutritious food. So far, one of Bimala’s goats has given birth to two kids. Two of her other goats are currently pregnant. This means that Bimala and her family can maintain a higher standard of living for years to come.



SIA – Live Your Dream Award, United States of America



Since 1972, Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA) has delivered its Live Your Dream Award programme – a unique education award for women who provide the primary financial support for their families.

The Live Your Dream Award gives women the resources they need to improve their education, skills and employment prospects. Over half of SIA's recipients are survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, or sexual assault. Nearly all of the women and families served have overcome enormous obstacles including poverty, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse.

Live Your Dream Award recipients may use the cash award to offset any costs associated with their efforts to attain higher education, including books, childcare, tuition, and transportation. The Live Your Dream Award helps women achieve better paying jobs and increase their standard of living for themselves and their families, thereby contributing to SDG

1, to end poverty. A total of 81 per cent of Live Your Dream Award recipients who completed their education have increased their standard of living to date.

This programme began 52 years ago. Soroptimist Clubs across the Americas recognised that more women were becoming the financial 'head' of their household. Being able to support their families in pursuing additional education and training means that whole family units can become economically empowered and avoid poverty. Since the project began, it has impacted approximately 43,000 women through scholarships, totaling USD 44 million. In 2022/2023, 2,174 women received the award.

TESTIMONIAL



Camille (pictured) was named a 2022 recipient from SI Waikiki, in Hawaii. Upon receiving the award, she said "My dream was to build a life for my daughter and me.

[Through this award] I was able to gain experience through my internships which reignited my love for science and research... Aside from the financial assistance it has given me, this award has shown me that there are people who are cheering [me on] and believe in my dream."



Key Recommendations **SDG 1**



These two projects are among the many examples of work Soroptimist International is doing to economically empower women and girls, in all their diversity, around the world.

Despite the hard work of communities working to support other women and girls, through the provision of interest-free loans, entrepreneurship, and financial assistance to enable access to education, the number of women and girls still living in poverty is stark.

The United Nations must invest in meaningful solutions to economically empower all women and girls in all their diversity. Importantly, women and girls play a vital role as agents of change for sustainable development.

Empowering all women and girls to take a central role in the effective development and delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions is crucial to improving community and global responses to the intersecting crises faced by communities around the world.

Soroptimist International recommends the following as essential measures that must be taken by United Nations Member States to end poverty, in all its forms, everywhere:

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- Increase investments in quality education and lifelong learning, focusing on enabling all women and girls into paid work, education and training;
 - Adopt inclusive, universal healthcare via increased investments in quality healthcare provisions, staffing, training and community education programmes;
 - Bridge the gender pay gap by providing equal pay for work of equal value between men and women and establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages, with the provision of accessible financial support and training to enable those who wish to develop entrepreneurial skills;
 - Implement universal social protection system floors to alleviate poverty by ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled;
 - Urgently address gender disparities in financial resource allocation, advocating for gender-responsive budgeting;
 - Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all women and girls across the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, including ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation; and
 - Measure and prioritise the wellbeing of all women and girls beyond GDP by deploying multidimensional indicators to ensure quality, disaggregated data collection.
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SDG 2 (End Hunger)



The world is in a crippling and escalating hunger crisis.

According to the 2023 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report, at least 345 million people across 82 countries are at risk of acute food insecurity, and 50 million people are on the brink of famine. Soroptimist International recognises that gender equality is a determinant of food security and understands the unique challenges that women and girls – in all their diversity – face globally.

Access to and control over productive resources, such as land, water, livestock, and seed, is a key contributor to food security. Responses to the global hunger crisis must account for communities' diverse experiences of food insecurity, particularly how they are shaped by entrenched gender inequalities.

This includes women's access to land, agricultural technology, and financial support, as well as the gendered patterns of food consumption, which negatively impact women and girls' nutrition. These challenges are further compounded by unceasing economic crises and the global COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to negatively impact on all women and girls.

Given the direct correlation between food (in)security and gender (in)equality, Soroptimist International has a diverse range of projects working to address SDG 2.



SISEAP – Sustainable Food Security for Rural Communities, Malaysia

Soroptimist International of Malaysia, a member of Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific (SISEAP), launched a new food security project in January 2024 in collaboration with Good Growers PLT, a social enterprise with the mission to improve the livelihoods of the indigenous Orang Asli community.

SISEAP leaders visit the greenhouse where the rock melons are growing.



The indigenous people of the Orang Asli community in Malaysia practice integrated and aquaponics farming. Aquaponics is a sustainable farming method that combines aquaculture (raising fish) with hydroponics (growing plants in nutrient-rich water without soil). In aquaponics farming, fish waste is recycled through a bio-filtration system and broken down into nitrates and nitrites using cultivated good bacteria. The nutrient-rich water is used to grow pesticide-free vegetables like kangkong, baby bayam (spinach) and HK choysum. The system uses minimal water for irrigation and the water is recycled.

The main objective of the pilot project is to train the Orang Asli of Kg Sungai Lebak which is located near the town of Bentong, in Pahang, Malaysia. This village has around 90 villagers who currently earn a living by working on other farms nearby or by taking on part time jobs. Phase one of the project involves training 10 family members in aquaponics farming and focuses on both theoretical and practical lessons.

This project was launched because Orang Asli communities in Malaysia usually live in remote villages that are far from mainstream development. They often lack access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and nutritious food.

Villagers frequently suffer from chronic diarrhoea, stunting of growth, anaemia and other vitamin deficiencies. Many homes lack electricity and children usually stop school after primary school due to financial constraints and lack of transportation to secondary schools. By teaching aquaponics farming, the whole village (approximately 90 people) will have access to a variety of nutritious food which will improve food security and the overall health of the community.

Excess produce, including cash crops like rock melons, can also be sold in nearby local markets, enabling villagers to earn a steady income and promote economic empowerment. Aquaponic systems can operate throughout the year regardless of seasonal fluctuations and adverse weather conditions.



SIAF – Agriculture for Empowerment, Democratic Republic of Congo



Members of SI Limete Club in DRC harvesting some of their crops.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been ravaged by armed conflict for more than three decades, which has led to extreme rates of poverty, particularly among women and children.

SI Limete Club, a member of Soroptimist International Africa Federation (SIAF) in Kinshasa, partnered with l'Association de Développement pour la Promotion de la Femme et de l'Enfant (Development Association for the Promotion of Women and Children) to empower women living in poverty by training them in the production and sale of agricultural products. Many of the women involved in this project are unemployed, single mothers, internally displaced by the ongoing conflict, or have been exploited by the mining industry in the DRC.

Beyond training women in agriculture and business techniques, women are provided with the necessary agricultural equipment to grow

and harvest their crops before selling their products at the Kinshasa market, where they can make a self-sustaining earning.

So far, the project has supported 60 women heads of households per year. With each of them having five children on average, the Agriculture for Empowerment initiative helps at least 300 people. This number excludes other members of the families and the wider community who enjoy locally grown produce, leading to better nutrition, food security, and a boost to the local economy.

TESTIMONIAL



Rose*, a widow and mother to seven children who has been displaced by conflict in the DRC, says this project has helped her to build a more prosperous and sustainable life for her and her children. It has enabled her

not only to enjoy food security, but she can now afford to send her children to school. Rose is now attending a higher-level training programme in project management to take her business to the next level.

*Not her real name.



SIE – Moving the World to End Hunger, Burkina Faso



Children at a school in Burkina Faso are full of smiles during lunch time.

School meal support is an essential part of achieving SDG 2 and 4 (quality education), and is vital to ensuring that children, especially girls, are enrolled in school.

In Burkina Faso, the availability of free school meals encourages parents to send their children, including their daughters, to school. In addition to ensuring food security, schools are safe places. This is particularly important in countries like Burkina Faso, where the security situation is volatile, and girls are at an increased risk of experiencing extreme forms of violence.

SI Vejle in Denmark, along with 39 other SI Danish Clubs have, for the last 12 years, visited local schools in the country to raise awareness among Danish children on the importance of school meals, especially for those in Global South countries. The Danish school children participate in fundraisers such as bike rides through Denmark, raising enough money to buy two school meals per day for all students

in selected schools across Burkina Faso for an entire school year.

In 2023 alone, 950 school children and their families in Burkina Faso have benefitted from this project. The average school attendance rate for girls has improved to at least 80 per cent attending school. Working closely with the World Food Programme (WFP)'s country office in Ouagadougou, SI Vejle receives updates from the United Nations office in the capital, as well as the Ministry of Education regarding the national security context and the evolving situation this has on children attending school. In this way, SI Vejle can continue providing free school meals to children across Burkina Faso, often moving resources to emergency schools when the security situation worsens.



SIGBI – Bingley Community Kitchen, United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has been working in the local community of Bingley and its surrounding areas.

Members of SI Bingley have worked in partnership with a range of organisations including the local council, Rotary Club of Bingley Airedale and local churches.

Bingley Community Kitchen's weekly FoodSavers Market stall provides a wide range of self-selected affordable food for vulnerable families. The project began in November 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as members were increasingly concerned how food insecurity was impacting the local community. School feedback indicated that there were many families in Bingley needing additional support.

In 2021, the local authority provided Bingley Community Kitchen with a grant to provide a market stall where vulnerable families could select the food they required. Fast forward to October 2022, Bingley Community Kitchen joined the Bradford FoodSavers programme, where customers come weekly to select 15 items of food for a membership fee of



SIGBI President (right) and a member of SI Bingley attend the Community Kitchen.

just GBP 5. Of this amount, GBP 1 goes to a recognised Credit Union scheme, enabling customers to save.

The Bingley Community Kitchen has empowered and enabled families in the town to select healthy, nutritious foods at a low cost. Simultaneously, it reduces the amount of waste going to landfill. The number of customers coming to the kitchen between 2022 to 2023 tripled, positively impacting 636 people.

TESTIMONIAL



Sandra* who attends the kitchen said "I came in feeling suicidal and I am leaving feeling I have hope. You are my lifeline!"

This project has been recognised as a model of excellence within the FoodSavers network. Community kitchens like this one in Bingley are proven to be highly effective projects to improve food security and eradicate poverty – and they can be replicated in almost any country.

*Not her real name.



Key Recommendations **SDG 2**



Soroptimist International calls upon all United Nations Member States to:

- Provide effective and sustainable solutions to food insecurity and strategies to remove impediments and violations of the human right to food;
 - Empower all women and girls to be leaders, experts and agents of change in food production, distribution and consumption, by enabling them as decision makers at the local, national and international levels;
 - Develop and implement legislation to ensure gender equality across ownership and inheritance of land and other resources;
 - Adopt a legal and institutional framework to assist those within its jurisdiction to ensure their food security, including water rights, land rights, transportation systems, food storage and distribution systems; and
 - Fully support, at all levels, the role of all women, including indigenous knowledge of food systems, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
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SDG 13 (Combat Climate Change)



The impact of climate change around the world has become impossible to ignore. All United Nations Member States must approach this crisis as an existential human rights crisis.

The rights of all women and girls are especially threatened by the adverse effects of climate change: the intersections of poverty, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and other identities result in additional multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion regarding dealing with the complex challenges of the climate crisis. Climate change is significantly undermining hard-won development gains and poverty reduction efforts (including through food security), as recurrent shocks in acutely impacted States are increasingly intense.

Soroptimists have always been dedicated to addressing the issues related to the environment. The first-ever Soroptimist project was to 'Save the Redwoods', which was launched by the first Soroptimist Club formed in 1921 in Alameda County, California. These great ancient trees were being cut down at an alarming rate. The Club lobbied the legislature, taking on powerful lumber companies, and winning public support, which resulted in a major portion of the forest being set aside as protected land, that still exists today.



SISEAP – Restoration Sustainability, Mongolia



Members of SI Darkhan Club in Mongolia work together to address desertification issues in their local area.

Mongolia is among the most vulnerable countries to climate change.

Land degradation and desertification are not only causing the decline in crops for livestock to graze, but they are also negatively impacting the wider ecosystem including chronic drought and increased exposure to secondary impacts like dust storms.

The SI Darkhan Club, of Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific (SISEAP), was requested by the Government of Mongolia to provide technical support for a pilot tree planting campaign. Around 80 per cent of the local community, both women and men, offered their time to support this important initiative. Traditionally, men in Mongolia participate at higher rates than women in formal, paid jobs; and when women do work, the gender pay gap is stark. The women that participated in this

project proved their leadership, creativity and strong commitment to improving their local environment.

In addition to the tree planting, SI Darkhan Club initiated a bee keeping project as another solution to tackling land degradation experienced in the community. Beekeeping is a relatively simple yet excellent example of how to improve environmental sustainability through pollination and the reduction of desertification; meanwhile farmers can harvest and sell the bees' honey. As a result of this project, increasing numbers of herders in Mongolia have agreed to control their livestock numbers, now that they understand the negative impacts of overgrazing.



SIE – CommuniTree Reforestation, Nicaragua



A young farmer prepares the trees for planting.

Meerbusch Goes Future is one example of how Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) are working to combat climate change and support women and girls negatively impacted by it.

The project is an initiative established by the SI Meerbusch Club in Germany, working in partnership with the local savings bank Sparkasse Neuss and a local company called Kyocera.

The project works to raise awareness and advocate for climate mitigation and environmental protection among local stakeholders in the town of Meerbusch, including companies, schools, and its citizens. Engaging the local community has subsequently triggered private and entrepreneurial action in the Global South – in particular, in Nicaragua. Smallholder farmer families are working to reforest parts of their land that have become barren. Smallholders globally produce 33 per cent of the world's food but are among the poorest people in the world. Therefore, increasing the forest area leads to new paid employment opportunities for local people and an enhanced understanding about the importance of maintaining forested land.

SI Meerbusch partnered with three other non-governmental organisations: 1) myclimate – a Swiss project developer for international climate protection projects; 2) Plan Vivo – an organisation certifying the impact of projects that provide environmental and social benefits

to communities, including CO₂ accountability; and 3) Taking Roots – a local NGO in Nicaragua working with local farmers. Since the project began in 2020, 29 other SI European Clubs have become involved in the initiative.

In 2023, SIE collected EUR 11,000 for the CommuniTree project, which equals approximately 3,600 trees planted and approximately 750 tonnes of CO₂ absorbed by those trees. Over the year, CommuniTree restored 3,720 hectares of land and issued 988,658 certified ex-ante carbon credits. In addition to removing carbon from the atmosphere, the programme has supported 173 local people, including farmers, to grow 5,096,559 new trees. Going beyond supporting these local people individually, the project has in no doubt benefitted a community at large, through improved air quality and biodiversity restoration.

TESTIMONIAL

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Lucía, a farmer working on the CommuniTree Reforestation project said “I have children and grandchildren, and I will leave my best inheritance: my trees.”

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SIAF – Greening Kibera Roadside Initiative, Kenya



Members of SI Nairobi Central Club visit the Kibera roadsides after 'greenifying' them.

The SI Nairobi Central Club, of Soroptimist International Africa Federation (SIAF), launched a tree planting campaign, called Green Kibera for Food Security. Kibera is the largest deprived area in Nairobi and is home to approximately 250,000 people.

The roadside tree planting campaign was inspired by previous tree planting held during World Environment Day, with the idea to rally local people together to address biodiversity loss and pollution; as well as to grow vegetables by the roadsides of Kibera to improve nutrition rates among locals.

On 23 April 2021, the SI Club, along with the area Chief, women's groups, youth groups, and opinion leaders (known as *Makina*) in Kibera, worked together to achieve a mass tree planting effort which resulted in over 1,500 food and flower trees being planted in just one hour. The partnership was initiated by doctors from Kenyatta National Hospital and professors from the University of Nairobi. The doctors conducted an awareness session for members of women's groups and youth groups on the value of kitchen gardens to

improving families' overall health; and the SI Club delivered a session on the importance of a clean environment.

Thanks to the project, 500 households in Kibera now have access to seasonal vegetables from the road reserve gardens, translating to approximately 3,000 lives impacted. Members of the community have agreed to maintain the trees and vegetable gardens, which has now been named the 'Soroptimist Friendship Food Forest Park'. As such, this sustainable planting project will continue to improve the overall health and wellbeing of thousands more families living in poverty – thus also contributing to SDGs 1, 2 and 5, by working directly with women and girls to improve their knowledge of climate change mitigation and adaptation.



IF NOT NOW, WHEN?



The adverse effects of climate change are inextricably linked to human rights and gender inequality – and the rights of women and girls are especially threatened.

The intersections of poverty, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and other identities result in additional multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion regarding dealing with climate crisis. Climate change negatively impacts women and girls' health by exposing them to contaminated water, diseases, pollution, and dehydration, all of which can also affect a woman's ability to avoid poverty.

Soroptimist International continues to deliver a diverse range of projects that should be replicated in contexts globally. Solutions to climate change must be adopted at all levels. Projects at the local level, like those outlined in this report, can indeed make significant

improvements to local communities. However, it is the legal obligation of all United Nations Member States to ensure that the fundamental human rights of all persons within its borders, including all women and girls, are respected, protected and fulfilled. Industrialised countries in particular must take responsibility and make serious strides forward on their climate agendas.

The need to act at a global level could not be more urgent. Research has highlighted that unless climate change is curbed, it will drive up to 130 million more people into poverty in the next decade and displace up to 216 million people by 2050.



Key Recommendations **SDG 13**



Soroptimist International therefore demands that all United Nations Member States:

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- Fulfill legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement and further Declarations on climate action;
 - Halt all new investments in fossil fuels with immediate effect, and begin a swift, just transition to implementing clean, renewable energies;
 - Place a higher priority on increasing women and girls' participation, decision-making and leadership in climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction;
 - Develop and implement policies to build gender-sensitive resilience in communities affected by natural and human-made disasters, including safe shelter and food security;
 - Fully support all women, including indigenous women, to share their vital knowledge of food systems, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation; and
 - Consistently assess and publish quality data about the effects of climate change to allow climate related decisions to be made with the participation of an informed public.

“ Soroptimist International urges all United Nations Member States to recognise the direct impact of the climate crisis on women and girls.

SI PRESIDENT, PUAN SRI SIEW YONG GNANALINGAM



SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)



SDG 16 calls for peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, including access to justice for all, and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Peace means freedom from violence – not only in times of conflict, but in our everyday life. Soroptimist International works with women and girls at the local level to fight for justice, whether it be through efforts to end child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) or tackle domestic violence, for example.



Soroptimist International Foundation – Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal, Malawi

Young female leaders attending a seminar on the importance of education as a means to avoid child and early marriage.



Prior to the establishment of the Soroptimist International Foundation as a base for international projects, each Soroptimist International President launched a President's Appeal, under a specific theme.

Immediate Past President Maureen Maguire's initiative, Opening Doors to a Bright Future, delivered projects across several countries, including Malawi.

In Malawi, a transformative project is underway to address several of the SDGs, including SDG 16, on peace and justice. The project works to combat the prevalent issue of child and early marriage. Child and early marriage are serious issues in Malawi, particularly in rural areas, with rates ranging from 40 to 50 per cent.

Child and early marriage not only deny girls their education and future prospects, but it also exposes them to additional forms of violence and discrimination which can lead to a range of health risks including early pregnancy.

While child marriage has been made illegal in Malawi, implementation remains a challenge due to poverty and entrenched societal attitudes towards it. The project, which is funded by the SI Region of Taiwan and delivered in partnership with Amitofo Care Centre, works towards providing education and support to 150 local women who were child brides. Ten of these women have been selected to receive a two-year educational bursary that covers all their expenses. In this way, the girls are supported in an environment where they can learn and transform their attitudes towards education, enhance their skills, and open up opportunities for employment and improved livelihoods.



SLA – Ending Child Marriage, Cameroon



Albertine Scray, a member of SI Illiana, with some of the children being supported at Mbiede School in Cameroon.

Two Soroptimist Clubs in the Americas, SI Illiana and SI Chicago, teamed up with a Soroptimist member and Founder of Mumzy's Child Relief Organisation, to create educational opportunities for girls located in two villages, called Mbiede and Nkol-Mcondi, located in the jungle of Cameroon.

Girls in the villages are very often married once they have their first period, leading to a lack of stability from a young age, very few employability opportunities and an increased risk of violence and abuse. Through educational sessions with the girls and their mothers, SI learned that the mothers did not want their daughters to marry so young, but they did not know how to hide the fact that the girls had their periods.

During the project's first year (June 2022 to June 2023), the goal was to increase the number of girls attending school by educating parents and leaders that it was important for girls to attend school. Despite school tuition costing the equivalent of USD 10 per child, parents in these villages most often sent their son instead of their daughter to school if they could afford the fees. The Soroptimist Clubs provided tuition money for 100 girls to attend school, by holding Club fundraisers, soliciting donations from individuals and through private foundations.

Partnering with Days for Girls, over 1,000 washable sanitary kits were obtained and distributed to the girls and mothers. The kits were sewn and put together by the SI Fond du Lac Club in Wisconsin, United States, and the Green Bay Wisconsin Days for Girls Chapter. Kits included underpants, two washable sanitary pads, and soap in a discrete carry bag. Bras were also provided to ensure that the girls had undergarments. Backpacks and other school supplies were also donated to ensure the girls were prepared with the correct resources to learn.

In the second year of the project, the percentage of girls to boys attending school was 40 per cent girls compared to 60 per cent boys. Girls were

provided with uniforms, and an additional two concrete school rooms were built. A toilet block was built which provided the girls with safe water, sanitation systems, and privacy.

Girls across the two villages continue to receive education and are visited by a medical team annually. Empowering girls to remain in school through educating their parents and local leaders not only enables the girls to reach their full educational potential, but they are afforded justice as children with their lives ahead of them. Working to end child marriage through enabling educational opportunities and sharing critical knowledge has helped to empower 100 girls across two remote villages in Cameroon, where information on these subjects is limited. The girls' mothers have also been educated and empowered by engaging in training sessions on menstrual health, which helps to address the wider community taboo regarding periods through better understanding and knowledge.

The project is ongoing, and tuition and supplies will continue to be provided annually. In addition, through a partnership with a trade school, girls who complete their primary education will be able to attend trade school. There, they will be able to learn new skills and expand their employability opportunities. While the project is focused at improving the opportunities of the girls, and ensuring a life free from violence, the project has a wider impact on the entire community because the schools provide a meeting place for the community. As a result, the community has been sending more girls to school, and they are willing to allow the girls to study and marry later.



Peace Means Freedom From Violence



This grandmother is caring for her grandchild while her daughter attends school.

These projects, like many other Soroptimist International projects highlighted throughout this report, address several SDGs, and this intersection must be noted.

Yet at the crux of it all, by working to transform societal attitudes and enabling girls into an education, Soroptimist International and its partners strive to ensure that girls in Malawi and Cameroon are free from violence. Learning is a transformative experience, and in these two examples, a step away from violence, towards a pathway of sustainable peace and justice.

In a time of escalating global insecurity and the widespread rollback of women and girls' most basic human rights, objective recognition must be given to the enduring and extensive absence of women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes at a global scale and

within regions and nations. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda, now more than ever, must be fully implemented as a critical tool for building sustainable peace and economically strong communities. Women and girls around the world are facing new levels of violence, discrimination and harassment in their daily lives. Furthermore, women and girls living in conflict-affected countries are suffering immensely. They lack of basic protection, medical care and critical aid shortages in food, clean drinking water and sanitation.

These situations are pushing more women and girls into poverty and situations of increased vulnerability through no fault of their own.



Key Recommendations **SDG 16**



Soroptimist International urges United Nations Member States to:

- Honour their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including by adapting their national laws;
- Fully implement all aspects of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and all subsequent Resolutions;
- Consider greater use of conditions, incentives and accountability tools, including international criminal proceedings, in order to strengthen the protection of all women and girls in conflict-affected countries; and
- Cooperate with civil society and humanitarian agencies to ensure that gender sensitive humanitarian relief can be safely delivered to affected populations during and post-conflict, including menstrual hygiene kits.

SI President Puan Sri Siew Yong Gnanalingam standing next to the bronze sculpture 'Non-Violence' which is located outside the United Nations Secretariat Building in New York.



SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)



In Soroptimist International's Federations there are many Clubs whose members design and deliver strategic grassroots projects based on local needs, to ensure effective and sustainable solutions to improve the lives of thousands of women and girls every year.

This work has been ongoing since Soroptimist International's establishment in 1921 and has been bolstered by working in partnership with other civil society organisations.

Soroptimist International strongly encourages United Nations Member States to embrace the diverse wealth of knowledge and skills that civil society can provide.

Working in silos has proven to be largely ineffective to date. We can and must be stronger by working together, in partnerships. Soroptimist International continues to actively collaborate with and contribute to projects in partnership with other civil society organisations. We believe that positive change can be most effectively achieved when we work together towards our common goals.



Commonwealth Business Women's Network

Soroptimist International has, for many years, been involved in the work of The Commonwealth, with Soroptimist Clubs in 36 of the Commonwealth's 56 member countries.

The Commonwealth offers a unique perspective on issues that are prevalent to the work of Soroptimist International, including advancing gender equality and social justice at large. In 2022, Soroptimist International appointed a Representative to the Commonwealth to strengthen its advocacy efforts in Commonwealth countries.

Having specific representation for the last two years has enabled Soroptimist International to develop strong relationships across the Commonwealth network, including with the Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN). One key project that Soroptimist International and CBWN collaborated on was the Visible and Vocal public speaking competition, specifically for girls aged between 10 and 11 years old. The competition was the first public speaking competition held between many Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries and was designed to achieve several important objectives: encouraging girls to play a more prominent role in public life, improving the art of communication, developing research techniques, nurturing effective speaking abilities, and boosting self-confidence and personality.

Soroptimist Clubs worldwide conducted local public speaking competitions, culminating in the grand finale on 10 December 2023, to commemorate both Soroptimist International Foundation Day and the United Nations Human Rights Day.

Stefanie, from the Philippines (pictured at her Grade 6 school graduation) was the Winner of the 2023 Visible and Vocal public speaking competition.



These talented young orators presented their thought-provoking insights and perspectives on pressing global issues, showcasing their passion, intellect and determination. The competition showcased the power of effective communication.

In addition to this project, Soroptimist International's partnership with CBWN has enabled Soroptimist International to contribute its expertise and influence at a range of roundtables at the Commonwealth Headquarters on key areas including gender responsive procurement and contracting; gender and climate change (including discussions prior to COP28); and women in leadership in the financial sector. These meetings, including the Women's Affairs Ministers' meeting in the Bahamas, brought together women from diverse backgrounds with policymakers and the private sector.





Two girls making use of the new school toilet and handwashing facilities in Bulgaria.

WOMEN FOR WATER PARTNERSHIP

Soroptimist International's partner organisations also deliver grassroots projects focusing on providing women with education and training.

One of Soroptimist International's partners – Women for Water Partnership (WfWP) – manages its own projects and helps women and girls to develop leadership skills at all levels of the water sector. WfWP and its 28 member organisations use water as an entry point to women's empowerment and to improve equitable access to water for all.

At the global level WfWP and its member organisations use their collective voice for women and girls in a global agenda setting and

contribute to international policy development through the United Nations and other global processes.

Soroptimist International has been a member of Women for Water Partnership since 2015. We work together on grassroots projects, prepare joint statements to deliver at the United Nations, and deliver joint parallel and side events focusing on access to clean water and sanitation and the need to include women and girls in all levels of leadership.



EVERY WOMAN TREATY



Every Woman Treaty is a global coalition of more than 3,800 women's rights advocates and organisations in 147 countries working to advance a treaty to end violence against women and girls in the form of a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In 2022, Soroptimist International partnered with Every Woman Treaty and continues to advocate for the development of a global, binding instrument that will make the world safer for all women and girls.

During the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Soroptimist International hosted a parallel event which discussed the urgency for an Optional Protocol to CEDAW – specifically, the intersecting issues of poverty, climate change, and violence against women and girls – and how a new Optional Protocol to CEDAW is part of the solution.

An Optional Protocol would bring much-needed accountability on Governments to ensure the security of all women and girls. International covenants have proven to have a significant impact on national laws and practices even on nations that do not sign them: among the best examples is CEDAW.

Soroptimist International will continue to work alongside Every Woman Treaty advocating at the individual, local, national, and international levels to end all forms of violence against women and girls.



Soroptimist International Foundation – Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal, Georgia

Young women in Georgia smile with their certificates received upon completion of their nail technician training.



The Opening Doors to a Bright Future Appeal – under the Soroptimist International Foundation – has continued a project in Georgia, Eastern Europe, following on from Immediate Past President Maureen Maguire’s President’s Appeal.

The project was established in October 2022 in partnership with World Vision Georgia and a Soroptimist Club, SI Kutaisi Colchis in Georgia. The partnership worked to empower women and girls by improving life skills and employability in a country where 74 per cent of women experience intimate partner violence. This was achieved through a series of targeted interventions which addressed social entrepreneurship, financial literacy, professional training, basic English language learning, and public advocacy campaigns on women’s empowerment. The first phase of the project supported 60 young women and has laid the groundwork for transformative change.

The Soroptimist International Foundation and World Vision Georgia’s partnership continues to strengthen, and we are currently working to support a new cohort of 55 additional women and girls in Georgia. Fundamentally, by empowering women and girls to take control of their own lives, the project not only continues to enhance individual well-being but also contributes to the overall prosperity and progress of vulnerable communities in Georgia through the establishment of women-owned small and medium size enterprises.



A FUTURE TO LIVE FOR?



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres' vision for the future of global cooperation, as laid out in Our Common Agenda, calls for "inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism to better respond and deliver for the people and planet to get the world back on track by turbocharging action on the SDGs".

It outlines solutions to address the gaps and challenges that have come to light since 2015, calling for a Summit of the Future which will be held in September 2024.

The Summit of the Future offers an enormous opportunity to realign Member States' values of peace, people and planet and find multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow. This opportunity must be embraced to its fullest. Assessments of global progress of all SDGs including all those under review in

2024, are currently in peril. All United Nations Member States have a serious obligation under international law to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of all persons, including all women and girls. It is critical that the Summit of the Future gains impetus for change.

However, for this to happen, Member States must step up and fulfill their obligations as duty-bearers of the most basic human rights.



Key Recommendations **SDG 17**

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



Soroptimist International demands that all United Nations Member States:

- Actively engage with civil society organisations to attain quality knowledge of local issues in specific contexts, as well as action-oriented solutions that are fit for purpose; and
- Apply a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach to all policies, legislation, discussions and decisions related to all aspects of poverty eradication and development.

We now live without the guarantee of a safe, healthy planet for our children and in a time of unparalleled threats to global peace and security.

All United Nations Member States must recognise the severe consequences of their inaction for women and girls in all their diversity everywhere and embrace collaboration in the name of the people, the planet, and global peace.

They must urgently work not only with other Member States, but with civil society and other actors, to propel the SDGs for the sake of our children and any future generations.

Women and children beneficiaries of Soroptimist International's partnership with the Cambodian Community Dream Organisation.



RECOMMENDATIONS

FULL LIST

Soroptimist International, throughout this report, has outlined specific asks that all United Nations Member States must act on. The comprehensive list of recommendations is as follows:

- Increase investments in quality education and lifelong learning, focusing on enabling all women and girls into paid work, education and training;
- Adopt inclusive, universal healthcare via increased investments in quality healthcare provisions, staffing, training and community education programmes;
- Bridge the gender pay gap by providing equal pay for work of equal value between men and women and establishing non-discriminatory liveable wages, with the provision of accessible financial support and training to enable those who wish to develop entrepreneurial skills;
- Implement universal social protection system floors to alleviate poverty by ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled;
- Urgently address gender disparities in financial resource allocation, advocating for gender-responsive budgeting;
- Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all women and girls across the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, including ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation;
- Measure and prioritise the wellbeing of all women and girls beyond GDP by deploying multidimensional indicators to ensure quality, disaggregated data collection;
- Provide effective and sustainable solutions to food insecurity and strategies to remove impediments and violations of the human right to food;
- Empower all women and girls to be leaders, experts and agents of change in food production, distribution and consumption, by enabling them as decision makers at the local, national and international levels;
- Develop and implement legislation to ensure gender equality across ownership and inheritance of land and other resources;
- Adopt a legal and institutional framework to assist those within its jurisdiction to ensure their food security, including water rights, land rights, transportation systems, food storage and distribution systems;
- Fully support, at all levels, the role of all women, including indigenous knowledge of food systems, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation and mitigation;



- Fulfill legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement and further Declarations on climate action;
- Halt all new investments in fossil fuels with immediate effect, and begin a swift, just transition to implementing clean, renewable energies;
- Place a higher priority on increasing women and girls' participation, decision-making and leadership in climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction;
- Develop and implement policies to build gender-sensitive resilience in communities affected by natural and human-made disasters, including safe shelter and food security;
- Consistently assess and publish quality data about the effects of climate change to allow climate related decisions to be made with the participation of an informed public;
- Honour their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including by adapting their national laws;
- Fully implement all aspects of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and all subsequent Resolutions;
- Consider greater use of conditions, incentives and accountability tools, including international criminal proceedings, in order to strengthen the protection of all women and girls in conflict-affected countries;
- Cooperate with civil society and humanitarian agencies to ensure that gender sensitive humanitarian relief can be safely delivered to affected populations during and post-conflict, including menstrual hygiene kits;
- Actively engage with civil society organisations to attain quality knowledge of local issues in specific contexts, as well as action-oriented solutions that are fit for purpose; and
- Apply a gender-sensitive and human rights-based approach to all policies, legislation, discussions and decisions related to all aspects of poverty eradication and development.

Soroptimist International also urges United Nations Member States to draw upon the sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions offered by civil society organisations. As demonstrated throughout this report, the expansive work that civil society organisations continue to contribute to improve communities worldwide should be learned from, and best practices should be replicated across diverse contexts. The work of civil society alone does not have the power to fully dismantle systematic biases, discrimination and inequalities that continue to disproportionately impact women and girls in all their diversity.

All United Nations Member States must wake their global conscience and uphold their moral obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of all persons, including all women and girls. Values of peace, dignity and prosperity for all must be the priority.

Together, it is our global responsibility to work towards a more equal, peaceful, and prosperous future, truly leaving no one behind.



IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Human Rights-based Approach

All policies and legislation must hold gender inclusivity and human rights at their core to ensure equal protection for all, in accordance with international law and human rights treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Where relevant, national laws should be amended and strengthened to ensure that the human rights of all women and girls are respected, protected and fulfilled under every circumstance.

Gender Mainstreaming

Women and girls can be drivers of sustainable development. Governments should make a conscious effort to ensure that gender is meaningfully included in all aspects of policy, decision-making and leadership. This must also be included in the planning, design, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programmes. However, gender mainstreaming must not be utilised as a tokenistic approach to merely 'add women' to the table, without fully assessing and addressing the systemic biases and discrimination they face. In this way, intersectional approaches to all Government decisions are critical. This should be inclusive of not only gender, but age, income, race, ethnicity, marital status, migration status, geographical location, disability, and all other identifying factors.



Members of the SI Advocacy Team at the United Nations 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2024.



IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTINUED

Gender Disaggregated Data

Governments must measure and prioritise the wellbeing of all women and girls beyond gross domestic product (GDP) by deploying multidimensional indicators to ensure quality,

disaggregated data collection. Gender disaggregated data is essential to understand lived realities and implement policies that align with these lived experiences.

Gender Responsive Budgeting

Gender responsive budgeting is an important public governance tool designed to reduce social and economic disparities between women and men by integrating gender into financial policies, striving for a fair distribution of resources. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “when implemented effectively, gender responsive budgeting helps to expose how gender inequalities may have inadvertently become embedded in public policies”. It helps to more equitably allocate resources as well as promote effective budget measures to close gender gaps. In addition, gender responsive budgeting can help to promote accountability and transparency in fiscal planning.

In line with the Agreed Conclusions of the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, gender responsive budgeting is necessary “to address gaps in resourcing all national and sectoral plans and policies for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. Soroptimist International encourages this outcome agreed by United Nations Member States in which they have committed themselves towards more equitably sharing resources including with all women and girls.



CONCLUSION



The challenges faced by the international community at large are existential, putting the achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in peril.

In a time of growing political instability, climate breakdown, economic crisis, and increasing conflicts, women and girls in all their diversity are paying the heaviest price.

With only six years to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is a dire need to reinvigorate multilateral dialogue and enact sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions worldwide. The international community now sits at a critical juncture at which our future and the future of our youth depends on the actions taken today, including every Goal set out within the 2030 Agenda. This holds particularly true for the SDGs under review during the 2024 High-Level Political Forum: Goals 1 (End Poverty), 2 (End Hunger), 13 (Combat Climate Change), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

A disconnected approach to social, economic and environmental policies has not produced the desired results towards poverty eradication and reducing inequality. Policies on economic, social and environmental development should therefore be interconnected to ensure that people, in particular women and children living in poverty and other vulnerable situations, benefit from inclusive economic growth and development.

According to UN Women, an integrated policy approach would lift nearly 150 million women and girls out of poverty by 2030. Governments and civil society must work together to ensure no one is left behind.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to all five Soroptimist International Federations for their unwavering commitment to improving the lives of women and girls in all their diversity worldwide.

The projects highlighted in this 2024 report are only a handful among hundreds of Soroptimist projects that are ongoing to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Intersecting Crises

How Soroptimist International is lifting women and girls out of poverty around the world

UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF) REPORT 2024



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