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Statement presented by Soroptimist International on Theme 2 Development

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For years we have stressed the need to provide women and girls their right to an equal access to a high quality and inclusive education which includes closing the gender gaps in access to, retention in and completion of secondary and tertiary education as well as obtaining skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in information and communications technology in order for women and girls to successfully deal with the water crisis and have the capacity to become more resilient in the process. However, the record regarding women and girls having equal access to the retention in and completion of such an education in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals including SDG Goal # 6 is grim and abundant. Women and girls have been increasingly being left behind globally as gender gaps regarding digital literacy and STEM education continue to grow. These gaps are apparent from the lowest skill proficiency levels with the divides growing further along the skills spectrum until, once one arrives at the frontiers of water technology, the gaps have become an ocean.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the cost of not having such an education in today's technology-saturated societies as digital literacy and STEM have moved from being optional to essential. Digital literacy and STEM are no longer a luxury but are lifelines for working, learning, keeping in touch and accessing and managing essential water related services as well as the water crisis itself. New technologies are also changing the structure of labour markets dealing with the water crisis. The good news is that they are providing new and different employment and management opportunities in these markets. An existing challenge remains for many women and girls who are still not educated in digital literacy or STEM that is that to perform these jobs or effectively address the water crisis, women and girls must now have skills ranging from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and in information and communications technology. Women also need the opportunity to get jobs in those fields.

Digital, educational and STEM gender gaps should be of particular concern, given that women account for roughly half of the world's population. In an effort to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind, States must urgently address this educational and digital divide, which disproportionately affects women and girls, by facilitating their access to information and communications technology and STEM education in order to enable women and girls to successfully deal with the water crisis and develop the skills, information and knowledge that are needed to support their labour market entry, livelihoods, well-being and resilience. States should also allow for certification of earlier acquired competences, using existing methodologies. In providing the education and digital tools that women and girls need, states will also improve the State's capacity to address and solve the present and future challenges dealing with the water crisis.

In addition, while rapid technological and digital changes present opportunities and challenges, in dealing with the water crisis, the learning environment, the capacities of teachers and the quality of education has not kept pace; more than half of children and adolescents have not met minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics. Creating a platform for ministries of education, water resources, agencies, utilities etc. to improve the capacities of teachers as well as improve or change curricula at different levels (e.g. Academia, TVET, training courses) is needed to incorporate water management governance in the broadest sense and giving access to more stakeholder groups are necessary steps in achieving the SDG goal # 6.

Finally, states should set up a portal where academia and standard-promoting business groups can share their knowledge and make the public aware of existing tools which the public can use when dealing with the water crisis.



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President, Soroptimist International 2022 - 2023