

Global Perspectives on Eradicating  
Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a  
Changing World:  
making the SDGs work for women and girls



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Soroptimist International is a global women's organisation active in over 3,000 communities across 130 countries and territories world-wide. SI's work aims to 'educate, empower and enable' women and girls, contributing to the achievement of gender equality. The information in this report is based upon the experience and knowledge of Soroptimists who implement transformative projects at the local, national and international levels. The projects that SI undertake which contribute to the achievement of the SDGs demonstrate that civil society and NGOs can achieve transformational breakthroughs to achieve a sustainably developed world.

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## Introduction

As 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, focusing on “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”, Soroptimist International (SI) wishes to contribute the views of its members and present examples of evidence from the grass roots of a leading non-governmental organisation (NGO). Whilst we have seen millions lifted out of poverty in recent decades, so many others have been left behind. Efforts to reduce poverty are unlikely to be sustainable if specific attention is not paid to promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. Women and girls constitute the majority of people living in extreme poverty, partly due to having less access to education, employment and other resources which bring about stability and advancement. SI believes promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment is a central strategy for eradicating poverty, especially through access to education, financing, decision-making, formalized employment, child care, and protection from violence. To ensure full, equitable participation for all women and girls in society, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, Gender Equality should not be viewed as a standalone goal, but rather recognised as a means of providing interlinks between goals and targets of the SDGs. Gender inequalities are the most pervasive of all inequalities, and interactions between this goal and the other SDGs are strong.

SI actively contributes to the achievement of the SDGs through empowering local communities to create their own transformative change which supports the 2030 Agenda. SI engages with local communities to identify their needs, to understand the specific points of departure for poverty reduction and to inspire and promote

their unique innovations which can help build feasible solutions to local poverty. Active in over 3,000 communities across 130 countries and territories worldwide, SI works with local civil society organisations (CSOs) to play a significant role in delivering a broad spectrum of poverty reduction and social services.

The 2017 HLPF provides a vital opportunity for stakeholders to meet and discuss methods of implementation that will expedite the sustainable development process to the benefit of all people, especially those furthest behind. It is also an invitation for governments to share their experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned thus far, towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Governments and civil society efforts have yielded encouraging results in many areas, however accelerated progress is needed to reach the finish line of sustainable development by 2030 across all targets. We must ensure that this HLPF process serves as a fresh opportunity to reinforce the ‘political will’ of governments, and align ministries and stakeholders behind overarching goals for sustainable development.

This year’s review emphasises SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17, however governments should not overlook the cross cutting nature of the goals, and a unified and integrated approach must be taken when implementing the SDGs, especially in relation to gender equality. The SDGs guide the framework for SI’s activities, particularly goals 1, 2, 3 and 5. In this paper, these four goals will be reviewed and evidence will be provided of direct action taken by SI at a grassroots level to achieve the SDGs, which is both sustainable and transferable across all communities.

## Sustainable Development Goals

### Goal One – End poverty in all its forms, everywhere

Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity, and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The intention to eradicate, not just reduce poverty, represents a major leap forward in terms of ambition compared with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is echoed in the commitment to “leave no one behind”. MDG 1 – halve extreme poverty rates by 2015, was met five years ahead of target. However, this progress was greatly uneven, and marred by stark differences within and amongst countries and regions, with extreme poverty mainly concentrated in rural areas. Whilst the number of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 1.9 billion to 836 million between 1990 and 2015<sup>i</sup> – we are still a long way from eradicating poverty and leaving no one behind, many people risk falling back into poverty, for example due to conflict and disaster.

All citizens have the right to a peaceful, just and inclusive society where the wealth of the world is shared. However, the task has become harder: globally we face growing challenges presented by extreme economic inequality, conflict and climate change – all of which seriously undermine the fight against poverty. More than 800 million people are living on less than \$1.25 a day<sup>ii</sup>, struggling for the most basic human rights. Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood; its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Poverty can have an enormous impact on the wellbeing of women and men, intrahousehold relations over lifetimes, and on the social cohesion of communities. The end of poverty can only be achieved with the end of gender-based

discrimination. Gender inequality makes and keeps women poor, depriving them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being. Women comprise of 43% of the agricultural labour force<sup>iii</sup>, therefore contributing to an important engine of growth and poverty reduction in the rural economy. However there exist multiple barriers which reduce women’s productivity, as a result of not having the same access to seeds, credit, technology and extension services. Women are very unlikely to own their own land – only 20 per cent of landowners globally are women<sup>iv</sup>. Property laws may discriminate against women inheriting family property, or social norms often favour male relatives. Discriminatory laws and policies which prevent women from controlling their productive resources lock them in a cycle of poverty and prevent them from becoming economically empowered. Poverty can only be eradicated through addressing the pervasive inequalities in incomes and economic opportunities between and within countries, between rural and urban areas, and between men and women. Macroeconomic policies that concentrate wealth amongst the very few, whilst impoverishing the many must be reformed. Success will require us to challenge power and vested interests. World leaders have promised again and again throughout history that poverty will be eradicated, it has no doubt that this is something that can truly be done.

### Goal Two – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Close to 800 million people are chronically undernourished and suffer from malnutrition in today’s world<sup>v</sup>, yet there is more than

enough food produced today to feed everyone. Another mounting challenge facing the world, is how to feed the growing global population – expected to rise to 10 billion by 2050. This is compounded by a planet which is also experiencing growing pressures on water and land scarcity, soil, land and biodiversity degradation, a deteriorating natural resource base and more frequent and severe weather events<sup>vi</sup>. Recognition must be given to, and use made of the experience and skills of all members of communities, especially women, who can contribute to ensuring that by 2050 the 2 billion additional people who will need to be fed can be provided for. Often, women lack the right resources to invest in agriculture, or have little knowledge of what agriculture and modern methods of sustainable and diversified consumption and production entail. The situation is complicated further by the impact of climate change on agriculture. The multiple discriminations that women face are key underlying drivers that make women more vulnerable to climate change, disasters, and conflict, especially women living in poverty, women with disabilities, women of African descent, older women and indigenous women. The effects of climate change also affect women’s ability to work in the fields, find suitable water sources and even gain an education, as drier soil beds mean more time spent collecting water and tilling, and potential less time in the classroom.

Progress of SDG1 promotes progress of SDG2, ensuring that all people have access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round is inextricably linked to poverty eradication and the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, and, as such, addressing undernutrition is indivisible from addressing poverty. Achieving SDG2 is crucial for women due to their key roles in food production, food preparation, and child care, but also because of their special vulnerabilities related to reproductive health. In poor households, women can be less likely to get the nutrients they need, as primary caregivers, they suffer from food insecurity and

malnutrition, often due to the maternal instinct to feed their young before themselves. The physical demands of pregnancy and breastfeeding can take its toll on women also. Undernourishment, sickness and inability to travel seriously hamper the ability of girls and women to take advantage of development resources and lower their work capacity pushing them further into poverty. They are therefore less able to contribute to the goals of equality and empowerment.

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*Empowering women in agriculture through increasing their decision-making over agriculture production and incomes improves both family health and nutrition outcomes*

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Goal Three – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development. There have been considerable social, economic and environmental changes during the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century which have positively affected the health of the global population, including progress made in increasing life expectancy and reducing some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality. Major strides have been made with increasing access to clean water and sanitation, curbing endemic diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, polio, influenza and the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is worth noting that seventy percent of the new diseases that have emerged in humans over recent decades are of animal origin<sup>vii</sup>, which has a significant impact on food security and nutrition. Many of the advancements have benefited women’s health, counterbalancing this, women are at higher risk of infectious diseases, and suffer more severely from illness than men for many reasons, including biologic differences, poor diets, frequent pregnancies, social inequities, and restrictive cultural norms keeping them at

home. Furthermore, the social, economic, and psychologic effects of the disease are more severe for women. When their partners or fathers die, women often lose economic rights. As women are so often the caretakers of their family's health, this role can increase their risk of infectious diseases and prevent adequate and timely treatment. Rural women are even more vulnerable, due to limited transport links making it difficult to access medical services. Reducing health disparities for women requires a multidisciplinary global effort to combat the root causes of these disparities—social, economic, and educational inequities that fuel the spread of diseases and perpetuate poverty throughout the world.

Policies that commit to creating and strengthening a gender and age responsive education and health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, information and education, particularly in conflict and post conflict settings, and rural areas should be championed. Youth and children must be recognised as critical agents of change and play a vital role in articulating their own needs for a healthy environment and implementing the 2030 Agenda. As such, investing in and protecting children is paramount to ending intergenerational poverty, and promoting prosperity. At the time of birth, a baby's chance of survival increases significantly with delivery in a health facility in the presence of a skilled birth attendant. A child's risk of dying is highest in the neonatal period, the first 28 days of life<sup>viii</sup>, with a child most likely to die from a readily preventable or treatable disease. Whilst major progress has been made in recent years, many countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, will need to accelerate the pace of progress to achieve the SDG 3.

## Goal Five – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender equality is not only a stand-alone goal of the SDGs, it is also a cross-cutting requirement for effective sustainable development, and thus a fundamental

perspective for the implementation of every SDG. Whilst SDG 5 should be celebrated, commitments on gender equality are not new and despite efforts to improve the status of women and girls they are still chronically disadvantaged and discriminated against in many areas of their lives. If the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda are to be achieved, there needs to be legal and political reform to ensure that women and girls are included at all stages of sustainable development. Therefore, gender equality is a cross-cutting development issue, a means of implementation, and a critical policy measure for countries that want to achieve their full development potential. To achieve gender equality, National Action Plans that encompass gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting, effective quantitative and qualitative data collection, and specific efforts to include women in policy setting and decision-making processes should be developed. As National Action Plans have an enormous impact on future generations and on communities across the world, measures to reduce poverty whilst maintaining a gender-sensitive approach should be included in them.

No MDGs targets or indicators were related to violence, SI welcomes SDG Targets 5.2 and 5.3, which explicitly refer to the elimination of violence against women in all its forms, in the public and private sphere, and the elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM). The SDGs constitute a potentially powerful violence prevention agenda. However, successful implementation of the SDGs will not automatically reduce violence everywhere – in some countries, homicide rates increase as they move from low to middle income. Child marriage and FGM are more predominantly practiced in rural communities, at its heart, these harmful traditional practices are rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are somehow inferior to boys and men. These harmful traditional practices occur simply because they have done for generations, and often are linked to one

another; child marriage can follow FGM, which is considered a rite of passage to womanhood<sup>ix</sup>. Tackling this issue must come about through clear policies and commitment from government institutions alongside broader modernisation changes related to increased access to health care and education. To avoid parents considering that child marriage and FGM are the only acceptable option for an adolescent girl, safe reproductive health services must be made available to them. Ending these harmful practices, requires a concerted effort by governments, NGOs, schools and village leaders.

Sustainable development efforts must involve rigorous, gender-sensitive implementation as well as thorough monitoring and review mechanisms which can help drive progress forward. Persistent and chronic underinvestment in gender equality and women's empowerment has exacerbated development limitations. Therefore, all implementation processes should consider that women and girls are at a higher risk of being left behind. Goal 5 of the SDGs does not stand in isolation – a cohesive, integrated and complimentary approach must be agreed for the 2030 Agenda to be successful. Actions taken to achieve SDG 5 must reaffirm and contribute to the fulfilment of commitments to achieve gender equality that have already been agreed and ratified, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

### Gender Mainstreaming

Realising gender equality, women's and girls' human rights and their empowerment makes a crucial contribution to ensure that no one is left behind. Unfortunately, in every society, gender inequality, discrimination, violence against women and girls, violation of their human rights and lack of empowerment of women and girls persists. It is imperative to mainstream gender equality into all sectors and levels. Greater gender mainstreaming, including targeted actions and investments in the formulation and implementation of all

financial, economic, environmental and social policies must form part of all actions that are created in response to the 2030 Agenda. Already globally recognised as an essential development policy, gender mainstreaming must also be used at the regional, national and local levels. By using gender mainstreaming, gender-specific interventions can and should be designed in accordance to the needs of societies to overcome historical and systematic discrimination and enable all women and men to benefit equally from sustainable development efforts.

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*Using gender mainstreaming as a policy approach does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes that rectify inequality and discrimination. Instead gender mainstreaming can support the efficacy of those policies and programmes.*

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Gender mainstreaming is not about adding a 'woman's component' into an existing policy measure, rather, it is a holistic mechanism that recognises that all issues are women's issues and ensures that women's and girls' experiences and concerns are of equal value to those of men and boys; therefore, their needs should be included and assessed equally in policies and actions. Consequently, gender mainstreaming is an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes across the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) to ensure that all people equally experience the results of sustainable development efforts. When gender mainstreaming is effectively implemented as a policy approach and strategy, it drives transformational change as envisaged by the 2030 Agenda.



## SDGs in Action Educate to Lead: Nepal - SDGs 1, 4, 5

### Educating Women and Girls

Even before the 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck in 2015, Nepal suffered from extreme poverty due to political unrest, insurgency, and violence. Educate to Lead: Nepal was chosen as the SI President's Appeal 2015-2017 following the devastating earthquake which displaced millions of people. Thirty-nine of 75 districts of the country were severely affected by the earthquake. SI has invested in effective, meaningful and transparent partnerships to assist those most affected by the earthquake.

In rural Nepal, the poverty rate is almost three times higher than in Kathmandu, educational and medical facilities are limited and many children are undernourished. Following the natural disaster in 2015, women and girls suffered disproportionately and aid was unable to reach the most isolated rural areas, where 80% of the Nepalese population live. This natural disaster tended to have a two-fold impact on the education and employment sector, through damage to the infrastructure and facilities and the consequent interruption of schooling and income at a time when they are most needed, and indirectly, by an increase in the number of women and girls being trafficked due to lack of structure and a viable income. If a woman's husband/partner has died in a disaster or has migrated to the city in search of work, she is then left to be head of the household with the sole responsibility of providing for her family. 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.

#### Partnerships

SI partnered with the Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF) to provide leadership and gender training for female teachers with a view to reducing gender discrimination in the

classroom across the Lower Solu Khumbu region. The training proved a great success, with a recorded sense of empowerment taken from the learnings of the workshops back into the classrooms. A Teacher Training Quality Education workshop (TTQE) was designed to fast track the most able teachers so they can train other teachers – creating a truly sustainable project. 116 female teachers and 35 REED staff (partners of AHF) received training in a series of workshops.



*Figure 1 Female teachers receiving gender training. Image courtesy of AHF.*

Additional expenses such as school uniforms, lunches and text books make school out of reach for many families, and if a family has the means to send a child to school, a son is often given this opportunity before a daughter. As such, many women and girls face a future largely dominated by caring for their families,

without access to education or the opportunity to earn an income.

As part of the TTQE programme, community based education assistance for children in the greatest need of educational support is provided. Furthermore, the TTQE programme provided 14 girls with vocational training aimed at creating long-term livelihood opportunities, economic independence and the opportunity to be leaders in their communities. This training was made available for girls at a high school level, either in school or to those who had left school early, providing them skills in practical trades. The young women chose to study sewing, tailoring and beautician training due to realistic income producing opportunities. Two beauty parlours and five sewing centres have been set up, with several graduates planning on taking advanced training to expand their opportunities further.

Nepal is a source country for trafficking, and girls face the danger of being recruited for brothels in India due to a lack of economic opportunities. There are an estimated 12,000-15,000 women and children trafficked across the Nepalese border each year<sup>x</sup>. Over 40% are believed to be children under the age of 18 years and the magnitude of trafficking in persons, especially of women and children, has increased following the earthquake. Educating women and girls in rural Nepal gives this and the next generation the tools and opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. SI partners with Maiti Nepal to invest in transit housing in the Kailali District, western Nepal, close to the Indian border, to support rescued women and girls from brothels in India, or to intercept those on their way to India. Ninety women have benefitted directly from the housing along with counselling, training, healing from trauma, income generation training and reintegration in a safe environment whilst they prepare to become self-sufficient.

SI partners with Harambee Arts, a pioneer in the development and delivery of a toolkit of psychosocial activities, working to transform

and improve the lives of women and children suffering the devastating psychosocial impact of human trafficking, poverty, war, violence and illness. The project offers 26 Expressive Arts workshops to women and girls who have survived, or are at risk of human trafficking with the aim of alleviating the effects of trauma on children and women; transforming numbness into well-being and powerlessness into action. In addition, workshops are run for girls in a slum area of Kathmandu, and girls who are employed in the entertainment sector. Most of these girls have moved from remote areas to the city. After six months, fourteen of the girls (seven from each sector) will be invited to undergo further intensive training to become certified as Harambee Arts Nepal facilitators and a portion of the funding will go towards the train-the-trainer programme provided for these fourteen girls. It is estimated that the project will directly benefit 312 women and girls.

*Chhaupadi* – which translates to ‘untouchable being’ – has been practiced for centuries in Nepal, as well as in parts of India and Bangladesh. *Chhaupadi* involves banishing a woman to a cattle shed or makeshift hut during time of menstruation or just after childbirth for eleven days due to belief that it is ‘impure’. Although *chhaupadi* was outlawed by Nepal’s supreme court in 2005, the practice is still widely observed in the western parts of the country, where low development rates, gender inequality, community tradition and high illiteracy all contribute to its continuation. SI partners with Days for Girls to set up enterprises in five villages in Nepal, with the aim of training at least six women in each village in sewing, management, book-keeping and basic business skills to produce re-useable menstrual hygiene kits. Providing a woman with the tools to make a Days for Girls Kit educates her about the importance of menstrual hygiene management and the cycle continues as she educates others. This is truly a sustainable business model; a project for women, operated by women and providing

women with a source of income. This project brings women and girls together in a community and ensures that school or work days do not have to be missed due to their menstrual cycle. A team on the ground will select the villages to participate in the project, including the targeting of a village with an 8% literacy rate. In each village 1,000 girls will be named as Ambassadors and given training in hygiene and anatomy as well as a Days for Girls kit. This project operates in over 100 countries, and SI has been supporting Days for Girls since its inception in Nepal in January 2017.

### Conclusion

There is no doubt the need for assistance is great in Nepal, in what is labelled one of the poorest countries in the world, even before the earthquake of April 2015. SI decided to focus on rural Nepal, as poverty remains predominantly a rural phenomenon with 96% of the poor living in rural areas; 29% of the rural population fall below the poverty line versus 8% of the urban population<sup>xi</sup>. SI has found that projects which focus on skills development and income generation for underprivileged women who endure economic hardship and have no social support in their communities yield the best results. Women and girls' vital role as leaders and agents of change needs to be recognised. Only through increasing education and economic opportunities for women can they reach their full potential and we can live in a truly equitable world.

### SDGs in Action – See Solar Cook Solar – SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 - Providing access to sustainable energy

Using schools as a community focal point, See Solar, Cook Solar (SSCS), the SI President's Appeal 2013-2015 in Uganda mobilised a global civil network to transform rural

communities, providing access to sustainable energy safe sanitation facilities and improved educational facilities. See Solar, Cook Solar addresses all three pillars of sustainable development, providing social, economic and environmental benefits.

Around the world, more than 2.5 billion people do not have access to power<sup>xii</sup>. For most of these individuals, light and power comes from toxic fossil fuels such as kerosene that create greenhouse gases – CO<sub>2</sub> being one of them. Living in impoverished, rural communities, far from the electrical grid, contribute to challenges in accessing light, safe sanitation, food, cooking, and sustainable social development. Due to the prohibitive cost of batteries and kerosene, there is a reliance on women and children to gather firewood instead. Time spent gathering firewood, is time lost on attending school or earning an income. Solar power and other sustainable energy sources play a critical role in achieving many of the SDGs. The productive use of renewable energy in rural areas helps raise incomes and improve health, providing power to pump water for irrigation, process crops, light homes, schools, and hospitals - all services of premier importance, bringing significant benefits to the lives of those living in these remote rural communities. This project provided support directly to over 5,500 beneficiaries, the majority of whom are female, children and elderly.

### Partnerships

SSCS worked with two schools in rural western Uganda, Kinyaminagha school and Musasa school, each with 700 pupils. Initially the project was developed to provide solar lighting and cooking facilities to the school and community, therefore increasing access to, and the quality of, education and food. However, the project quickly progressed to

fulfil other needs in line with the SDGs. A rain water harvesting system to provide safe drinking water was installed, which increased girls' attendance at school, as they were no longer required to collect water and provided the community with clean water for cooking. The water supply system is highly sustainable, supplying clean potable water not only for the school but also for the local community by providing water collection tanks, bio-sand filters and wash facilities. After the schools were equipped with solar energy, computers were installed, providing a truly holistic approach to this project.



*Figure 2 Girls at Musasa primary school in rural western Uganda learn to use laptops powered by solar energy*

To ensure programme sustainability, training was given on how to use and maintain the solar-energy equipment, rainwater systems and bio-sand filters to promote self-sufficiency within the communities and create long term positive outcomes. To maximise efficacy, and contribute to sustainable development efforts, this project contained clear objectives from the outset that accounted for the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development. Gender sensitive implementation methodologies and evaluation processes were carried out, to ensure that women and girls benefitted from the development processes equally, and steps towards closing the gender gap were made. To achieve a holistic approach and drive transformational change, gender mainstreaming was promoted throughout the project.

The SSCS projects involved several stakeholders; ranging from volunteers, beneficiaries, suppliers, aid agencies and professional staff. To ensure the optimum outcomes appropriate to the project's location, in-depth research of suppliers was critical to a successful outcome. Through investing in meaningful and transparent multi-stakeholder partnerships, this paved the way for poverty eradication and SDG implementation.

### Conclusion

SSCS extended the reach of sustainable development efforts. Project feedback and community inclusion has promoted good practice, raised awareness of environmental issues, and has developed SI's expertise in implementing projects. The benefit of this project will have long term positive outcomes, including educational, safety, social, environmental and health benefits. According to UNICEF, 2,000 children under the age of five die every day from diarrhoeal diseases and of these some 1,800 deaths are linked to water, sanitation and hygiene<sup>xiii</sup>. 663 million people in the world (1 in 10 people)<sup>xiv</sup> live without clean water – access to water means education, income and health. The head teacher from Musasa school reported that academic performance has increased due to the solar lighting which allows the girls to extend their study hours, have access to computers and the internet, whilst reducing their time spent gathering water.

Implementing projects within areas of need by its very nature means that there are difficulties and risks, good project planning helps minimise the risks and make good decisions. Developing good communicative relationships between the project team and a project coordinator at each project site ensured the smooth running of the projects and best fulfilled the needs of the communities worked with. Positive relationships with project teams on-the-ground ensured continuous information flows that supported North-South

partnerships for sustainable development, as per SDG 17.

## SDGs in Action – Birthing in the Pacific – SDGs 1, 3, 5 Maternal Health Training

In Papua New Guinea, many women live in isolated and rural communities, far from educational and medical facilities. By creating opportunities for healthcare clinicians to up-skill, particularly those in the rural and more remote areas of the country, the outcome for pregnant women and their babies is greatly enhanced and is one way of assisting in the reduction of the high maternal mortality ratio.

Birthing in the Pacific (BIP) was chosen as the SI President's Appeal 2011-2013, as a response to UN Millennium Development Goal 5 and the high maternal mortality rate in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This project also aligns with PNG's National Health Plan 2011 – 2020 goal to Improve Maternal Health. The United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights states that women have the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth<sup>xv</sup>. PNG has one of the highest rates of maternal death in the world, second only to Afghanistan in the Asia Pacific region<sup>xvi</sup>. The main causes of deaths related to pregnancy are prolonged labour and excessive bleeding; most of these deaths could be prevented if trained birth attendants and suitable health services were available. The risks for maternal deaths have increased due to the high fertility levels and shortened birth intervals over the past decade. Currently, a woman in PNG will have a 25 times higher chance of dying in her lifetime due to

childbirth, compared to those women not giving any birth<sup>xvii</sup>. Lack of right knowledge, skills and attitude toward effective management of obstetric complications is one of the contributing factors towards maternal morality and infant mortality. Only slightly more than 50 percent of women and girls give birth in a health facility or with the help of a skilled birth attendant<sup>xviii</sup>.

More than 80 per cent of the population of PNG live in remote rural areas, often without transport links making it difficult to access medical services. This problem is compounded by a struggling health system that has a severe shortage of skilled midwifery clinicians. The initial focus of BIP was on education, specifically the up-skilling of midwives, however as the project evolved, it became apparent that the scope should be broadened to up-skilling Community Health Workers (CHWs) whose initial 2-year training did not include midwifery, yet who are staffing the Community Health Centres in the rural areas where few midwives are to be found and where the majority of maternal deaths occur. BIP aims to assist in the reduction of maternal mortality by providing thorough and cohesive training and equipment to birthing clinicians (including Village Birth Attendants (VBAs), Community Health Workers (CHWs), midwives and doctors). CHWs play a vital role in helping to ensure safer outcomes for pregnant mothers, by being able to identify in advance where there is a high level of risk, so they can seek professional help and/or refer the women on in good time to travel to a hospital.

### Partnerships

A major partnership was developed between SI and the National Reproductive Health Training Unit (RHTU). RHTU delivered Essential Obstetric Courses and Emergency Obstetric Courses in 19 of the 21 PNG Provinces for midwifery health clinicians teaching in universities, training schools, hospitals and health centres. BIP provided educational materials for these courses. RHTU went on to

deliver training courses for specific qualifications, including Double Diploma Course in Midwifery, which led to one graduate attending a Midwives Conferences in New Zealand to present a paper on Midwifery in PNG. New equipment, such as neo-natal inflatable simulators, midwifery tools, obstetric wheels and birthing beds were purchased and distributed to midwives, CHWs and hospitals across the country.



Figure 3 Mother and baby, beneficiaries of Birthing in the Pacific

Another partnership was developed with the National Department of Health, School of Medicine, University of PNG and the Glen Mola Foundation for Community Health Workers from Health Centres across various Provinces to take part in a 6-month residential course in General Hospitals on Maternal and New Born Health. Between 2012 and 2016, 108 CHWs participated in these courses. The students each received a midwife kit on commencing the course and medical equipment upon graduation, and medical instruments for their Health Centres. BIP fully or partially funded all these courses. Professor Glen Mola wrote and

published a training manual for CHWs '*Caring for PNG Women and their Newborns*' and updated the National text book *Primary Health Care and Population Manual*, which included practice around family planning as part of safe motherhood. BIP assisted with the funding for these. 1,300 manuals were published and distributed to CHW training schools, and health workers.

What began as a pilot project in one hospital in one Province was taken up by other Provinces over the past 5 years. The success of the CHW Programme can be measured by the Programme having received accreditation in 2016 by the National Health Department.

### Conclusion

The BIP training programme has equipped participants to effectively identify problem areas and high risks signs and indicators early in pregnancy for mothers and predict complications early so appropriate management of patient care is applied. What began as a project in response to MDG 5, has gone on to greatly contribute to several SDGs; this project has undoubtedly contributed to assisting health clinicians to save the lives of mothers and their unborn babies. The project enables health workers to update, upskill and add to their knowledge, while providing them with an incentive. Due to the success of this project, more training courses will run in PNG in 2017.

## Recommendations for Policy and Implementation

Gender equality and women's empowerment is inextricably linked to poverty eradication, and this can be achieved through clear policies on improved access to education, financing and formalized employment for women, as well as protection from violence. Economic growth in developing countries would be more evenly distributed if governments endeavoured to commit a greater share of the trillions of dollars of public procurement to women<sup>xix</sup>. Investing in women and girls makes

economic sense, the private sector should be incentivized to become part of the solution. To effectively contribute to leaving no one behind in the achievement of SDG1 and related SDGs, policies need to be adjusted in different contexts. Through increasing support for inclusive social and economic empowerment, this can provide a holistic approach to tackling poverty, as was showcased in the outcomes of SSCS. Poverty is interlinked with environmental sustainability, education and health; solar energy is both environmentally sustainable and does not rely on sophisticated infrastructure, it allows students to study for longer; and enables the community to use cooking facilities in the school. The rapid acceleration of climate change calls for a corresponding rapid change in human practices. Through clear policies and commitment from governments, solar energy has the greatest potential to lift millions out of poverty and ensure energy access to all.

In line with the 2030 Agenda, governments need to provide comprehensive approaches across sectors, bringing together relevant ministries to addressing cross-cutting issues in a more coordinated manner. SSCS provides cooking facilities in the school for students - encouraging students to attend school, and for the community, which also promotes social cohesion, contributing to SDG 2, Zero Hunger, SDG 3, Quality Education, and SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Education is a primary means for poverty eradication. Government support should address multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination, and provide quality education and skills training to ensure the full, equitable and effective participation of all. Inclusive education strengthens democracy and allows greater access to information. Non-formal education must be included as part of the spectrum of educational approaches known to create effective learning outcomes. To promote women's participation in vocational education and training, specific efforts should be made to minimise the impact of external

constraints, including household responsibilities, reduced income and transportation problems, that prevent women from accessing available training opportunities. These external factors demonstrate the more stringent constraints faced by women and girls, the decisions which they must make, and the knock-on social and economic effects, highlighting the cross-cutting effect that education can have on achieving the SDGs.

Educate to Lead: Nepal highlights the critical role vocational training and education has for women and girls, both in empowering individuals and contributing to increasing essential services. By 'educating to lead', participants' empowerment is promoted and encouraged. By encouraging this empowering approach to education, leadership skills and abilities are promoted, and in turn help to better the lives of women and girls. This bottom-up approach contributes to increasing the participation of women and girls in decision making processes as leaders. The impacts of vocational training are often most pronounced in rural communities as skills acquisition are critical for economic growth and social development.

Education leads to greater participation in political life and in public decisions. Leaving no one behind must ensure that no one is left without access to information and knowledge of their rights and the possibility to act upon this knowledge. Whilst adult education and literacy should be orientated towards acquiring skills for the labour force, it should also focus on constructing full citizenship, especially for rural women.

### Women and Health

SI is concerned that many health care policies do not consider potential gender-based experiences, and the needs of women are discussed only in relation to motherhood or as care-givers. Whilst this is of course important, the multifaceted roles and lives of women should be better represented and considered

in policy development. For instance, sexual and reproductive health services for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes is essential for stable and sustainable development. SI supports a human rights based approach to sexual and reproductive health and recognises that universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare reduces the vulnerability of women and facilitates their right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children. Striving to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and education, addresses the rights of women and girls being made a reality and is a key aspect of empowerment.

BIP is not only about improving maternal health and eliminating maternal mortality, but also about healthcare, education, employment, and human rights. The provisioning of pre-natal and perinatal care is essential to delivering maternal health. Health care systems should be strengthened to be appropriate to changing societies, and should consult with women and care-givers to best provide for and respond to their needs. Maternity services should be free or heavily subsidised – no women should be unable to access appropriate maternal healthcare or trained medical personnel.

#### Data collection at grassroots level by NGOs and CSOs

NGOs and CSOs collect data across countries which unfortunately is often not available or even recognised in national statistical collection services. The achievement of the SDG targets requires information to be used from a variety of sources for successful monitoring and evaluation.

In the experience of SI, the collection of data at local level is vital to ensure a communities and SDG targets are met. NGOs can make an enormous impact in terms of expertise and knowledge. The relationship between NGOs and governments is dynamic, and should be strengthened to ensure that robust systems are in place and utilised to collect gender-differentiated reliable data. SI strongly urges governments to recognise the value of this work and its valid contribution to ensuring the SDG targets are met by 2030. Gender-differentiated statistics offer a numerical representation of the situational differences and inequalities between women and men in all areas of life, whilst gender differentiated indicators serve to measure reductions in gender inequality. Quantitative data is essential in assessing sustainable development progress, however, qualitative data also has a key role to play. For an in-depth knowledge about the status of women and girls to be accurate, it is important that gender-differentiated statistics and indicators are collected nationally, regionally and globally to measure gender gaps and adjust development programmes to rectify inequalities. To ensure countries fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind, SDG 17 outlines that data should be disaggregated based on age, sex, geography, income, disability, race and ethnicity and other factors relevant to monitoring inequalities (including multiple inequalities experienced by women and girls).



### Summary

It is essential that the focus of future policies and mechanisms that contribute to the achievement of empowerment and equality for girls and women of all ages must have a gender-sensitive, human rights-based approach and address the specific needs of the group. Further concerted, sustained and accountable actions based upon the above recommendations must be taken to close the gender gap and achieve the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. To achieve gender equality, the following actions and policies should be implemented:

- Implementation efforts should use gender mainstreaming approaches and principles, including gender budgeting and evaluation methodologies.
- Programmes and projects should be implemented in consultation with stakeholders and in response to their needs.
- Develop and introduce education for global citizenship and women's leadership.
- Promote and ensure the use of available technologies to increase access to quality education and employment, particularly for women and girls living in vulnerable situations.
- Establish effective, accountable, and gender sensitive monitoring systems and promote capacity building, including the involvements of NGOs and CSOs.
- Increase the economic role of women through technical support and enhanced access to financial services.
- Invest in effective, meaningful and transparent partnerships to achieve the SDGs.

### Final Conclusion

The MDGs helped to kick start widespread development efforts that focused on ensuring the most vulnerable were not left behind. The SDGs must continue with this good work so that all women benefit equally from sustainable development – no one should be left behind. Through working with local partners, SI has experienced the importance of a multidimensional approach to sustainable development. We must learn from the MDGs – to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls we must implement projects that truly recognise that these different elements of sustainable development are interlinked and interdependent. For the sustainable development agenda to be successful all stakeholders must have the ability to shape, influence and implement that agenda, as well as build capacity; CSOs and NGOs can achieve transformational breakthroughs to achieve a sustainably developed world.

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- ii <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-1-no-poverty.html>
- iii <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf>
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- v <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/288229/icode/>
- vi <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/goals/goal-2/en/>
- vii <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/210621/icode/>
- viii <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs178/en/>
- ix Young Lives, Child Marriage and Female Circumcisions (FGM/C): Evidence from Ethiopia, Policy brief 21, July 2014.
- x <http://www.friendsofwpcnepal.org/nepal/>
- xi [http://www.searo.who.int/nepal/CCS\\_2013\\_17.pdf?ua=1](http://www.searo.who.int/nepal/CCS_2013_17.pdf?ua=1)
- xii <https://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/cooking.pdf>
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Notes



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