

THE RIGHT TO LEARN

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) views the education of girls and young women as a fundamental human right.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Through its Member Organizations in 144 countries, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts are challenged and tested to develop and increase their strengths in a safe and secure environment.

As the voice of girls and young women WAGGGS has identified Access to Education and The Right to Learn as priority issues to take a stand on and speak out about.

Girls' Education Globally

- WAGGGS believes education is a basic human right and fundamental to the fight for human dignity and freedom. For 125 million children and 880 million adults, that right is violated everydayⁱ
- 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child', ratified by 192 countries, obliges governments to "make primary education compulsory and available free to all." Yet, of the 680 million children of primary school age, 115 million are not in school - two thirds of these being girls (57%)ⁱⁱ
- Economic hardship can mean many parents view survival as the main priority and often co-opt their children, especially girls, as additional labour resources or keep them at home to help with household chores and care. In the South, some 200 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 go to work instead of going to schoolⁱⁱⁱ
- Cultural and patriarchal family structures tend to prioritise the needs of boys over girls. Other obstacles to girls' education include a shortage of school space, lack of female teachers, long distances to travel, unaffordable fees and violence
- The earning potential of women is often lower than men as fewer women study subjects that lead to economic success. Education equips girls and women with the ability to acquire and process information and increased earning power. Every year of schooling lost represents a 10 to 20 per cent reduction in girls' future incomes^{iv}
- In 2005 the world missed the first Millennium Development Goal: to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Despite some improvement in girls' enrolment over the past decade, the rate at which the gender gap is closing will need to be accelerated if the targets are to be met by 2015.

WAGGGS calls on the international community to actively support free, quality basic education by 2015 and reverse the unacceptably slow progress on girls' education including;

- **Support** organizations involved in promoting the education of girls and young women
- **Increase** political commitment to give women's and girls' education a higher priority

- **Introduce** poverty-reduction strategies to ensure that the right to education is the right of every child
- **Eliminate** gender discrimination including the promotion of educational programmes that challenge traditional attitudes of men and boys toward women and girls
- **Provide** universal access to basic social and education services
- **Recognize** non-formal education as a positive method of learning.

WAGGGS asks Member Organizations to;

- **Emphasize** the importance of non-formal education to their governments
- **Work** in partnership with other NGOs and UN agencies
- **Build** confidence in girls and young women and break down gender stereotypes about education
- **Encourage** Girl Guides and Girl Scouts to get involved in IT, science, maths, sports and technology. Build these subjects into the curriculum and provide badges to motivate the girls
- **Find** out about the issue—Are girls excluded from school in your country? If so, what are the reasons for this?
- **Lobby** the international community to fulfil its promises to provide free, compulsory public basic education for by 2015.

How WAGGGS is addressing girls' education;

- The World Association provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills
- WAGGGS works with a number of international partners on education including UNICEF and UNESCO
- WAGGGS Member Organizations ran 107 education projects between 1996 and 2002 - from lessons in citizenship for Girl Guides in Ireland to IT training for young women in Egypt. WAGGGS' theme for 2002 to 2008, Our Rights, Our Responsibilities, focuses on the right to learn.

CASE STUDY

Girls' Education and HIV/AIDS

- Gender inequality is a major driver of the HIV pandemic with gender disparities in education particularly significant because they contribute to the social conditions that facilitate the spread of HIV.

- Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. It can help slow and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, as well as greater information about the disease and how to prevent it.
- HIV/AIDS infection rates are doubled among young people who do not finish primary school. It is estimated that if every girl and boy received a complete primary education, at least 7 million new cases of HIV could be prevented in a decade.^v

International Conventions on the Right to Education

The right to education is established in many international human rights instruments, including;

- Dakar Framework for Action
- The Millennium Declaration
- Convention on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Universal Declaration on Human Rights
- Convention Against Discrimination in Education

QUOTE

"...There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls." - Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi A. Annan

ⁱ UNESCO, 2005

ⁱⁱ UNESCO, 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ International Labour Organization (ILO), 2006

^{iv} Oxfam and Institute of Education, September 2005

^v Action Aid