

## **Statement submitted by Soroptimist International**

This statement is supported by Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and Women for Water Partnership, organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

The recent report by the United Nations Secretary-General entitled “Agriculture development, food security and nutrition” (2020) observed the rather dismal state of affairs regarding agricultural development, food security and malnutrition which existed before and after the arrival of the COVID 19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, current food systems did not sufficiently support the high ambitions of the 2030 Agenda as they were not serving everyone’s nutritional needs and agriculture was one of the largest causes of global environmental change —degrading soil, depleting freshwater, polluting waterways, reducing biodiversity and accelerating climate change, with significant social and economic costs. Added to this the reverse of the coin— extensive urbanisation with consequent reduction of farmland and the combined pressures push food security further into the future. It was reported that, prior to the pandemic, if recent trends continued, the number of people affected by hunger would surpass 840 million by 2030. Air and water pollution are killing 9 million people annually. It has now been estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic could add 132 million people or more to the total number of undernourished in the world in 2020.

Women’s poverty has been strongly correlated with a lack of household food security, safe drinking water and sanitation, and nutritional well-being. Women continue to be disproportionately associated with lower productivity compared with men, as they are burdened with unpaid care and domestic work, make up a higher proportion of informal labourers, receive lower average salaries and continue to have inadequate access to social protection. Still, women are the backbone of agriculture and key stewards of natural resources. Efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger are closely interlinked with economic, social and cultural drivers. Higher incomes and decent jobs enable access to higher-quality, nutritious food. In turn, food security and improved nutrition are key enabling factors for adult labour productivity.

Agriculture faces complex challenges between now and 2050 to satisfy an estimated world population of nine billion. Certain is that more water will be needed to produce the estimated 60 per cent of extra food needed. We need to focus on a more efficient, equitable and environmentally friendly water use in agriculture. Meeting future demand for food without further undermining the environment will require transformations in water management.

Nutrition also affects children’s capacity to develop, learn and grow, affecting both the present learning capacity and the future productivity and earnings of children. Maintaining childhood nutrition is thus essential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Promoting nutrition-sensitive social protection for poverty reduction involves strengthening coherence across sectors and policies, enhancing social inclusion and increasing access to water and sanitation, health and education to promote better nutritional outcomes. Trade-offs between interventions in agricultural sectors, food systems and the environment should be carefully addressed to avoid negative impacts on poverty, hunger and inequality.

Soroptimist International (SI) is a global volunteer movement of professional women, existing for almost 100 years, with a network of over 72,000 club members in 123 countries. SI’s mission is to transform the lives and status of women and girls and to accomplish this, we work at a local, national and international level to educate,

empower and enable opportunities for women and girls. As well as advocating for human rights and gender equality with representatives at seven UN centres in the world, our membership supports and initiates grassroots projects that help and sustain women and girls to achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in communities worldwide. SI's priority area of focus currently is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), concentrating on Goal 4 —Quality Education and Vocational Training and Goal 5— Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, closely interlinked with all other SDGs.

The 2020 UN Sustainable Goals Report provides extensive information on the impact of the pandemic on education and the closure of schools. Before the coronavirus crisis, projections showed that more than 200 million children would be out of school, and only 60 per cent of young people would be completing upper secondary education in 2030. It is clear that girls who have been out of school for a long period of time as a result of COVID-19 are less likely to return than boys thus losing their education and future prospects. School closures to stop the spread of COVID-19 are having an adverse impact on learning outcomes and social and behavioural development of children and youth. They have affected over 90 per cent of the world's student population —1.6 billion children and youth.

Children and young people used to receive school meals to counter their hunger due to poverty may be missing out of essential nutrition with the closure of schools and other education centres. In many towns and cities foodbanks provided by civil society organisations are seeing a huge increase in demand, especially where social protection measures are not available or inadequate.

Prior to the pandemic, urban populations consumed almost 80 per cent of food and accounted for a high prevalence of nutrition-related non-communicable diseases. COVID-19 has heavily affected the urban poor, threatening steady and affordable access to nutritious food. The coronavirus fuels hunger by disrupting global and national economies. The International Monetary Fund projects global growth in 2020 to fall by 2.8 per cent, compared with 0.1 per cent during the 2009 financial crisis. Such sizable contractions in the global economy will be damaging for many people around the world. The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research indicates that a five per cent GDP drop would place a further 85 million people in extreme poverty (defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day), inevitably leading to more food insecurity and hunger.

Fending off a hunger pandemic and helping to eradicate poverty and hunger, ensuring good nutrition and health, will require not just public investment in social protections but also greater action from private businesses through direct investment and through public-private partnerships in sectors such as agriculture and transport. A joint study from the World Food Programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development calculates that additional investments of about \$265 billion per year —just 0.3 per cent of projected world income— could eliminate poverty and hunger by 2030. That may seem like an enormous sum, but it is well within the means of richer countries, institutions, and individuals to mobilize.

These are the actions we propose to work toward sustainability:

- States, the private sector, and NGOs should provide for effective remedies to food insecurity and to impediments and violations of the human right to food. Food security related decisions must be made with the participation of an informed public that includes women and girls.
- Each State should adopt a legal and institutional framework that assists those within its jurisdiction to provide for food security, including water

rights, land rights, transportation systems, food storage and distribution systems and accessible, relevant health systems.

- States should provide lifelong learning opportunities, training and capacity building that target women and girls and support their roles in improving food security, nutrition and health and empower them to be leaders, experts and agents of change.
- States should fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, including creating appropriate legal measures to incorporate the Convention into domestic law. This must include a functional institutional mechanism, and an understanding of Article 14 as a critical step in strengthening food security and improvements in health and welfare systems to ensure a move toward gender equity.

With populations increasing, it is estimated that more than 820 million people annually will suffer food insecurity and poor nutrition. With climate change increasing the risk to many communities and their water and food security, all actors must adjust their platforms for discussion of including women from all levels and sectors of society to ensure that the voices of all women are heard. All actions should aim toward ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals really do ensure that development in all areas is sustainable for the future so that every population or community, rural or urban moves forward and no-one is left behind in the recovery from this global pandemic and to emerge from the crisis with a plan for a better world, “build back better, build forward greener and build a more gender equal society”.