



Summary of IFUW online discussion
Pre-Conference Consultation: Phase II
15 October – 16 November 2009

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Part I - EDUCATION

What action can you, your Branch, or NFA suggest that will address the needs of one or more of the issues below, and that applies in your situation?

Question 1:

How can we ensure that the laws and regulations that require the provision of compulsory, government-funded education for all children are implemented?

There were 18 responses to this question representing 16 NFAs. While all agreed that the provision of compulsory, government-funded education was desirable, the implementation of this was mixed, especially in developing countries, as a result of poverty and conservatism, especially in rural areas, lack of infrastructure such as buildings, sanitation arrangements, transport, equipment, lack of political will, failure of parents to value education, especially for girls – all factors that are well recognized by our membership. The question as to what a member, branch or NFA can do to address these inadequacies included

- Encourage women to take advantage of maternal and child health services (Nigeria)
- Work to improve relationships between civil society and government (Nigeria, Philippines, Canada)
- Encourage the UN to see that the Conventions are implemented, supported by NGOs (Turkey)
- Work with another NGO like the Association of Supporting Contemporary Living by providing scholarship funds to assist girls to attend school and university (Turkey)
- Work with a newspaper to support an advertisement 'C'mon girls, let's go to school' (Turkey)
- Lobbying government and Ministries with letters, submissions about Adult education (New Zealand), educational funding overall, a strategy to deal with homelessness among children, disability, housing for indigenous people (Australia), encouraging parental involvement, school inspections, teacher training and professional development (Canada). At the same time it was recognized that NGOs have to be cautious about appearing to criticize the government (Rwanda)
- Be aware of the UN instruments and how they must be implemented e.g. Rights of the Child, Rights of Indigenous People, CEDAW, Human Rights (Kenya, Australia)
- The provision of scholarships to support women returning to or taking up study (Zambia)

It was interesting to read about Ghana and India where it was reported that government actively supports and promotes education, by radio, TV and rural outreach (Ghana), especially in rural areas where people are less likely to value its importance. In Syria education is compulsory and failure to enrol children in school is punishable by imprisonment. Overall in the developing countries the greatest impediment would seem to be parental ignorance or conservatism which does not see the value of education as a stepping stone to a healthier and more productive life. As the member from

Liberia said *"I do not see a way around compulsory government-funded education if families are not empowered to help themselves and make their children feel like they (parents) are responsible for their well-being."*

The Liberian member also raised the matter of countries dependent on external support in order to provide the compulsory free education. She posed the question that if the external aid dries up how can government hold parents responsible for sending their children to school if the government is not able to meet its obligations?

These issues raise some suggestions of how members of an organization like IFUW with its commitment to education can be effective advocates to help solve these problems.

Question 2:

How can we promote the provision of lifelong education opportunities so that girls and women can become and remain productive members of society?

There were 13 responses to this question but unfortunately few specific examples of how to address the problems it raised. There were however a number of suggestions of how NFAs might be involved.

Ghana described government programmes that provide: 1. Gender differentiated capitation grants; 2. District and national level scholarships programmes for girls; 3. Community sensitization programmes for the importance of girl child education. The respondent saw this as a means by which members could 'pull' a girl along with her – be a role model and a mentor.

A Turkish respondent described initiatives run by municipal authorities and some NGOs that provided literacy training for artisanship but she pointed out that its success depended very much on the participant being able to get work as an outcome of the training.

India reported on the provision of government sponsored programmes that were geared to community needs and spoke of virtual programmes in which NGO participation was having beneficial results.

The Australian respondent spoke of the need to learn more about and support the funding of Vocational Training Institutes, ensuring that the programmes provided also met the needs of women.

While the Women Graduates-USA respondent said they are not directly involved with Community Colleges that are present in many counties of the States they recognized the important role that these institutions play in providing lifelong education. Another member referred the discussion to a BBC article about the correlation between education, lifestyle and long-term health for both a woman and her partner. The leader of this Swedish research went on to state that *"Women traditionally take more responsibility for the home than men do and, as a consequence, women's education might be more important for the family lifestyle – for example, in terms of food habits – than men's education."*

The Canadian respondent spoke of the important 'self-education' role their clubs provided for the membership as they undertook studies of a wide range of current social, political, educational and economic issues.

The Rwandan respondent pointed out the important role University women have in supporting and creating educational opportunities for women, through evening, afternoon and weekend courses particularly in vocational training.

A representative from Zambia spoke of her association with the Zambia National Women's Lobby and of the range of programmes in civic education that this group carries out including, in

conjunction with the Ministry of Education, programmes in secondary schools. Of particular interest in this case is the Scholarship Fund provided by the Zambian University Women that enables a woman to return to school so that she can become a better decision-maker. Some Zambian women believe that it is useful to return to school to learn more science, biology, nutrition, computing etc which will help them to run their homes more efficiently.

Question 3:

How can you promote the provision of clear, achievable career pathways for women, including in higher education institutions and in the professions?

There were nine responses to this question again with few specific examples of action but many suggestions of how NFAs could be more involved.

Turkey provides 600 scholarships for female students going to University. They are awarded on academic merit though need is also important and they encourage girls going into law, medicine, social sciences and engineering. At the same time they provide a mentoring programme especially for girls who are living away from their family.

It is suggested by the Ghanaian respondent that workshops and discussions are a useful way to be supportive of women students.

In writing to the New Zealand government over cuts to Adult Community education it was pointed out by the NFA that this cut was reducing an opportunity for women to return to tertiary education or to retrain after a break in employment and as such is a retrograde step.

The Rwanda respondent gave a concrete example of an action taken to address this question. With financial assistance from the Virginia Gildersleeve Fund and the Bina Roy Fund the members of the RAUW prepared a Career Booklet for high school girls to encourage them to plan their career path. They also recognize the importance of providing mentors and role models.

In Taiwan women have recognized the impact that teamwork and job sharing along with clear communication and appreciation of cultural understanding has on building confidence in women in the workplace.

The Zambian respondent reiterated her comments about the importance of women continuing or picking up skills training and the need for mentoring of high school girls.

The Australian, Canadian and Indian respondents urged NFAs to identify women who can be role models, including those who have combined a career with motherhood, and using their career pathways to show how you can go. The Indian respondent went on to speak of the importance of gender equity, 'gender neutral' recruitment, pay equity and the need to continue to acquire professional skills were also mentioned as tasks that can be undertaken by NGOs. Providing scholarships for post secondary education was reported by both Canada and India.

Question 4:

What can be done to create a society that recognizes and values the contributions made by women both in the workplace and as mothers in the home, and provides the sorts of help they need to do this, such as childcare?

There were eight responses to this question. With the exception of one concrete example (from Australia) there were only general comments on how NFAs can be involved in addressing the issues raised in the question.

In general the call was for 'Lobby, lobby, lobby!' with the Australian respondent describing the ultimately successful steps taken by their NFA to get paid maternity leave for Australian women and going on to say that they are now campaigning hard for childcare including in the holidays and after school.

As the Canadian respondent indicated it takes a long time to change attitudes.

India, like Australia, reports of a cooperative campaign with other NGOs to gain universal paid maternity leave and they are now moving to seek public childcare facilities and working meals to assist working women.

The respondent from the Philippines, currently living in Japan, illustrated the process being followed there with a new government promising to address the needs of families, establishing childcare and reforming pensions. In the Philippines she spoke of how NGOs can set up courses to train women in running their own business particularly to meet the needs for food production.

The respondent from Kenya spoke of the importance of recognizing the value of unpaid work in the home and called for flexible working hours to cater for the needs of working mothers.

In Rwanda, where the contributions of women in the workforce are recognized, there is no public childcare though time is allowed for breast-feeding. Also of concern is the fact that 'women's work' is not part of the public accounts!

In Zambia civic education carried out by the Zambia National Women's Lobby is creating an impact. Programmes include entrepreneurship training and project management.

Question 5:

What sorts of programmes can be introduced through the curriculum or as an extra-curricular activity so that students can explore aspects of sustainability like peace, cultural diversity, environmental protection, cooperation, and democracy?

This question received only three responses, two of which (India and Rwanda) listed programmes available in schools while the third, from Kenya, mentioned the importance of balancing academic skills with life skills. The respondent listed a number of useful programmes running in schools and said that she believed such programmes introduced diversity and that student participation in them should be acknowledged as broadening the student's knowledge and understanding.

Question 6:

Although this question elicited few responses it included nine examples of concrete action. *What proactive steps can you, your branch, or NFA suggest that might address ...:*

- a. *The need for literacy?*- In Rwanda the RAUW together with a Centre for Gender, Culture and Development Studies is applying for funding to set up an adult female literacy project.
- b. *Sexual/reproductive health/HIV/AIDS?* - RAUW is working with another Women's Centre to provide education on these issues. In Rwanda some members are involved in a community project in a rural area to provide latrines for girls to enable them to continue in school without interference during menstruation. In Mexico FEMU is taking up the cause of those women being punished for having an abortion despite the recently passed legislation that allows abortion before 12 weeks.
- c. *Environmental conservation?* - In India there is an awareness-raising process with the public in schools and Colleges about environmental conservation with campaigns, newsletters, media, seminars and workshops.

A second respondent from India reported about a waste management project established at a University College, which turned it into a 'zero wast' institution. The University Women's Association has started a Waste Management Awareness project with the ultimate aim of creating citizen action to deal with waste in their homes, localities and institutions. Australia reported that it has a government supported Enviroschools programme that makes grants to schools for environmental projects.

There was a report of a project carried out in Ethiopia to create a women's cooperative to produce cloth sanitary napkins. While this is cheaper than commercially produced products it could be a problem if water resources are scarce.

- d. *The need for professional development of teachers?* No replies
- e. *Lifelong learning for older women?* - RAUW is also partnering with the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development Studies establishing courses for older women.
- f. *The provision of a supportive and caring learning environment and resources for learning?* No response

Additional Discussion entitled 'Preliminaries to Discussion on Education'

A member from the Netherlands introduced a sideline in the discussion. She said that she believed that there were a number of preliminary issues around the education of girls that needed to be clarified before we proceeded with the prepared questions. Her concerns centred round how well education within a culture fitted girls for their future roles as employees and as mothers and homemakers, especially in times of financial crisis and unemployment.

The thirteen respondents to her questions fell into two camps – those who agree that training for homemaking and parental duties should take precedence, and those who believe that education is the way out of poverty and that to fail to provide education as a stepping-stone to independence for women and girls is to deny them their human rights, though they recognized that the education also needed to include education in life skills. While none of the respondents actually said how they, their branch or NFA would address some of the issues raised in this sideline to the actual discussion questions, some respondents from both developed and developing countries provided details about actions and programmes being undertaken to ensure that girls not only receive an education for employment that matches their culture but also have training in household management, nutrition, health and parenting. These included two responses, one from the USA and one from Japan, that gave in detail the types of programmes that were being provided now but which were earlier provided in the school Home Economics curriculum. As the member from Singapore said "*Different communities need to adopt suitable solutions depending on their social, cultural and economic milieu, but we cannot afford to neglect women's traditional care-giving activities which gives rise to issues such as women's work-life balance, neglect of the growing pool of the aged, falling birth rates etc.*"

We were grateful for a clear explanation, from one of IFUW's Representatives to the United Nations in Geneva, about the international instruments and principles that have been agreed at the UN and which are there to protect women and girls from discrimination and to promote and practice traditional values and culture.

It is clear from the 'discussion' that took place around the issues raised by the member from the Netherlands these are topics, which, while not directly related to the questions asked in the On-line discussion, impinge on all three of the themes suggested in the original questionnaire. As with the international treaty related topics in the questions it would be useful for us all to be more familiar with the international treaties so that we can work effectively with women and men to achieve gender equality.

Part II - FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

There were a total of eight responses to questions in this part of the discussion, representing six NFAs – Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Rwanda and Turkey. It is interesting that the five NFAs – England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France and Nepal, who highlighted aspects of financial independence for women as issues of concern did not participate in any of this part of the discussion.

Constructive suggestions for action included:

- Lobby/campaign government for Family Friendly Workplaces, Paid Parental leave, and Childcare, including pre-school, out-of-school and vacation care for children of working parents, pointing out the economic benefits as well as the social benefits in the provision of such services. ([Australia](#), [Canada](#), [New Zealand](#), [Rwanda](#))
- Lobbying for increased flexibility about the place of work and hours of work. ([India](#), [New Zealand](#))
- Lobbying for the provision of Adult Vocational training in tertiary and Further Education Institutes for women who have been made redundant or are returning to work after a break or because they wish to change career. Point out that it is better to have a person working and therefore contributing tax. ([Australia](#), [Canada](#), [New Zealand](#))
- Work with a social service agency to provide training for women who lose their job. ([Turkey](#))
- Fundraising to provide awards and scholarships to assist women to access further or second chance training and/or to provide for teen parent schools. ([Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), [Turkey](#))
- Support the provision of organizations providing services like, writing a CV, professional attire, transport, job interview training etc for women seeking work. ([NZ](#))
- Campaign for adequate government financial support for students. ([Australia](#))
- Disseminate information about women's **rights** regarding marriage, pregnancy, motherhood in relation to employment, money management, financial independence, saving for retirement, inheritance law by holding seminars, workshops, and public meetings. The Articles of CEDAW are useful to use here. ([Australia](#), [Canada](#), [India](#), [NZ](#), [Turkey](#))
- Campaign for equal pay for equal work, for equal pay for work of equal value and for recognition of the value of 'service' and 'caring' occupations. Work should be gender neutral. Collect evidence-based data and research discrimination practiced against women for CEDAW Shadow Report ([Australia](#), [Canada](#), [NZ](#), [Turkey](#))
- Advocate for suitable welfare policies such as an unemployment benefit as a safety net that enable a woman to live in dignity and able to fulfill her family responsibilities. ([Australia](#), [India](#))
- Encourage members into politics to put policies in place that benefit women and see that they are implemented. ([India](#), [Turkey](#))
- Establish a project to encourage girls to study Science and Technology and develop a Career Education Guide for High School Girls. ([Rwanda](#))
- Encourage members to be role models, mentors and learn how to negotiate. ([Australia](#), [India](#), [NZ](#), [Turkey](#))
- One respondent made a practical suggestion that retired members might consider establishing a crèche to serve a business, institution etc. ([India](#))

In many of these examples of action the NFA has not worked alone, for example, in lobbying, campaigning or in setting up courses or seminars to instruct women about financial matters. As Jennifer Strauss said "One reason for the strength of the public campaign came from the collaboration and coordination between women's NGOs." By affiliating with others a Branch or NFA is able to sign onto other's submissions. Jennifer stressed the importance of making alliances and designing strategies as well as acknowledging moves made by the government. Another point that I took from these responses confirmed the statement that I posted from the UN World Survey of the Role of Women in Development – '*Gender equality contributes to economic growth but economic growth does not always contribute to gender equality*', though the Turkish respondent did provide an

example of professional members who, by assisting village girls to get an education, provided them with much better opportunities for both gender equality and economic prosperity in the future.

As I was completing this summary I saw a statement on the Inter Press Service (IPS) from Ines Alberdi, the Executive Director of UNIFEM, who said,

“The time has now come for action on the effect of the global financial crisis on women, and other problems such as stereotyping, gender-based violence, unfair budgeting, lack of work opportunities and social protection for women, and the plight of women migrants.”

Those of you who responded to these questions have taken steps to address some of these aspects of Women’s financial independence and the SWC thanks you for your inputs.

Part III - EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

There were five responses to this Part of the discussion– from representatives in India, (2) The Philippines/Japan, Kenya and Rwanda.

Regarding **training for leadership** the following suggestions were made:

- Organize career ‘fairs’ or career education workshops with trained personnel for high school girls ([India, Rwanda](#))
- Provision of Computer studies, agriculture, livelihood courses like food production at a Library in a small community lacking facilities for such educational opportunities. ([Philippines](#))
- In partnership with private or public enterprises arrange courses for semi-literate/unskilled women leading to employment opportunities ([India, Rwanda, Philippines women living in Japan](#))
- Provision of scholarships ([India, Philippines](#))
- Hear reports from PhD students on research being undertaken. ([Rwanda](#))
- Alert women through the media and at meetings about opportunities and requirements for public office ([India, Philippines](#))

Discrimination can be addressed by:

- Alerting members to stereotypical advertising of products and services and making complaints about such discriminatory practices. ([India, Rwanda](#))
- Ensure that women are aware of laws against discrimination and ensure that they are enforced. ([Kenya](#))
- Lobby for women to be appointed to senior positions in decision-making, especially in security, financial, political and judicial sectors to ensure discrimination is not allowed. ([Kenya](#))

Education for empowerment:

- As with responses to women needing to have information in Part II of this discussion, the provision of courses/seminars/workshops, symposia advising women, not only of their legal and economic rights but how to exercise them or where to get help was a recommended action. It was also pointed out that some Women’s Studies Centres provide courses on women’s legal and economic rights so NFAs might lobby for such programmes to be provided. ([India, Kenya, Rwanda](#))

Information communication technologies (ICT) have been shown to have potential to increase women’s empowerment in small and micro-enterprises but it is dependent on the women being able to access the facilities such as road access, transport to markets, credit and the skills to use the technology for its effectiveness. It was pointed out that gaining the skills to use ICT empowers women, increases their employment choices and contributes to community development. This is seen as a very important action especially to assist women who work in the informal sector so that they can increase the efficiency of rural micro-enterprises. ([India, Kenya](#))

- Interviews with significant women in the community on public radio. ([Rwanda](#)) In Phase I of the Consultation Scotland referred to taking similar action though not via the media.

The [Rwandan](#) respondent reported that members of RAUW worked with the UNIFEM team to address **gender and sexual violence**.

There is a lack of organization to protect women suffering with violence in the Philippines

Under actions to ensure the **rights of women** the following point were made by the respondent from Kenya:

- The need for women to be aware of the law re technology, medicine, age of marriage, early pregnancy
- The provision of adult literacy classes
- Teen parents should be encouraged to complete school
- The need for adequate education funding to enable children to attend school.

The respondents from India, the Philippines and Rwanda reported that each of the issues mentioned in question 7 were real but that if they were dealt with it was by other NGOs to which their members might or might not belong.

The Philippines respondent, who is a resident in Japan, reported on the need for the rights of Filipino migrant women in Japan to be protected and that she personally was working to address this need across a number of areas especially language.

While India the Philippines and Rwanda recognized the importance of **CEDAW** only the Rwandan response mentioned direct action being taken by members of the NFA as members of a government agency established to monitor progress with gender equality.

I would like to thank the respondents in this Part of the discussion. Though few in number they have given us some useful examples of actions that have and can be undertaken whether as an NFA or as an individual member of their NFA or of IFUW, working with other groups who share their concerns and wish to address inequities in the society in which they live and work. What does come through in these responses is the complexity of addressing women's empowerment when it is dependent on so many variables. Clearly these will differ in different countries and even within different parts of a country. If we care about empowerment of women then it is our responsibility to identify what aspect of empowerment needs to be addressed within our own society and then to devise the most effective way to achieve this goal. As one of the respondents said in the parallel discussion "*So politics, economy, mentality and education are intertwined. There is a lot to do on this matter.*"

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Status of Women Committee wishes to thank the NFA representatives and individual members for participating in Phase II of this discussion.

The objective of the Pre-Conference Consultation is to provide NFAs with an opportunity to participate in planning the next Programme for Action. As you are aware, in Phase I NFAs were asked to identify, in order of importance, areas of concern that they believe need to be addressed.

They were:

- Education
- Financial Independence
- Empowerment of Women

In Phase II the objective has been to gather information about **ACTIONS** that had been or could be taken by NFAs or individual members of IFUW to address the many issues identified under each of the above headings. This explains why there were so many questions under each of these headings. We had hoped that NFAs would recognize the issues they had identified in Phase I and give examples of what they had done or planned to do to address them. Some NFAs did this, others referred to records of action, others responded as individuals from their personal experience and a considerable number who had identified aspects of one of the Categories above as a number one priority made no submission whatsoever!

There were a good number of responses to Part I of the discussion but at the same time a member raised a related issue that did not fit directly with the discussion questions in place and this led to a large exchange of emails that may have diverted respondents from the planned progression onto

Parts II and III. It has also been suggested that asking for NFA responses to the questions in such a tight time frame is unrealistic and I agree that is something we need to think about for the future. On-line discussions up till now have been largely personal responses to the issues under discussion and while in this case we welcomed individual responses we also hoped for NFA inputs. It now seems clear that more time was needed for consultation at the NFA level.

The Summaries that have been provided for Parts I, II and III do give some useful suggestions for actions. Members of the SWC will be looking at these more closely in order to determine where we go in Phase III of this Consultation in April 2010. Phase IV will take place at the Conference in Mexico City as a result of the plenary sessions, ID Seminars and Workshops at the Conference and following the Conference the SWC will put all this material together into a member-based Programme for Action.

The SWC is anxious that this different process for developing the Programme for Action will result in suggestions for action that will be useful for NFAs wanting to promote IFUW through their programme and action at a national level. We recognize that several NFAs have their own programme objectives but we do encourage NFAs to consider how the programmes they run and actions they take enhance and promote not only their own mission but also the mission and priorities of IFUW, all of which fit within the categories of topics identified by NFAs in Phase I.

We are also aware that the three headline topics are closely related. As was stated in the summary of Phase I of the Consultation 'the provision of affordable, quality education is critical in leading to opportunities for career advancement (and empowerment) for women; for lifting women out of poverty and enabling them to become financially independent.'

The November issue of the UNIFEM Electronic Newsletter, 'Currents' states that 'as women become economically empowered within the household, they are also less likely to suffer domestic violence.'

On the eve of celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of CEDAW, the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 10th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 10th anniversary of the Millennium Declaration it is appropriate for IFUW members and NFAs to be considering actions that could be undertaken that will advance progress towards gender equality. Participation in this Consultation is one way of sharing what IFUW members are doing to reach this goal.

Dorothy Meyer
Status of Women Committee
24 November 2009