



TRIENNIAL REPORT OF THE BOARD OF OFFICERS

During the 29th Conference held in Manchester in 2007, members of IFUW voiced a strong desire for greater focus within the Federation. The Board of Officers took this concern into account in its planning for the new triennium. In November 2007 the Board invited the Committee Convenors and the Assistant Treasurers to participate in a special planning meeting at which new priority areas for IFUW's actions were developed. These priority action areas were introduced to complement, and not to replace, the IFUW Programme for Action 2007-2010, *Women: Agents for Change: Building Sustainable Futures*. The implementation of the new priority areas has underpinned the work of the Board during the past three years. As the 30th Conference approaches, with this new strategic framework in mind, the Board is reporting on its successes, the obstacles it has encountered, the gaps that must still be addressed and possible directions for the future.

New Priority Action Areas

IFUW's work on improving the status of women and girls focused on four priorities, with two specific areas of concentration for each, during the 2007-2010 triennium.

Priority 1: Education for the Girl Child: Improve access to primary education; Improve retention of girls at primary and secondary schools.

Priority 2: Adult Literacy for Women: Improve access to all forms of literacy for women; Promote human rights education.

Priority 3: Access to and the Advancement of Women in Higher Education: Remove barriers to women's access to higher education; Improve gender equality in higher education institutions.

Priority 4: Women as Leaders and Decision-Makers: Facilitate access to information about participation opportunities; Promote change in the culture of work.

Strategic framework

At its meeting in 2008, the Board drafted a framework identifying strategies for making more effective use of IFUW's resources. It set incremental goals for focusing IFUW's international advocacy on the four priority areas, starting with 50% in 2008, 60% in 2009 and 75% in 2010. This has given clearer direction to our UN representatives in deciding which meetings they attend and the areas on which IFUW has made statements or oral interventions. Emphasis has been placed on promotion of the aspects of the current Programme for Action that are within these priorities and how they contribute to the achievement of the related Millennium Development Goals. The Board has tried to strengthen links with UN agencies and secretariats whose mandates are most closely linked with these priorities. The President and other Board members met with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) secretariats, to explore ways of increasing our inputs into their work.

Working groups were set up to implement activities in the priority action areas. The Working Group on the Education Advocacy Handbook, convened by Marianne Haslegrave, has been working to produce a guide that will be launched at the Conference in Mexico. The Working Group on the Girl Child, co-convened by Monica Cullum (Canada) and Justine Mbabazi (Rwanda) developed promotional materials for key international conventions and protocols, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also collected examples of best NFA programmes and advocacy practices promoting education for girl children. These will be posted on the website soon. The Working Group on Higher Education, convened by Catherine Bell, has not yet advanced very far in a statistical project on international advocacy.

Pre-Conference Consultation on IFUW Programme

In 2008/2009 a Programme Survey was carried out to evaluate existing programmes and identify new programmes that will enhance IFUW through international advocacy, action by national federations and associations (NFAs) and individual action. The IFUW Board of Officers hired Dr Marcia Penn, an outside consultant who had worked with IFUW's 2004 Task Force, to design an on-line survey and to analyze the results (assisted by Marianne Haslegrave, IFUW Vice President, Catherine Bell, IFUW Treasurer, and Dorothy Meyer, IFUW Status of Women Convener.) The survey was open for response for two months (November 2008 to January 2009) during which time 179 IFUW members participated.

The key conclusions as stated in the survey are:

- 1 There was general agreement that the current mission of IFUW, "to empower women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace" is appropriate and should be continued as the organization moves forward.
- 2 There appeared to be positive confirmation as to the value and creative uses of IFUW's Programme for Action (PfA) at the regional, national and local levels. Materials from IFUW that were made available for the 2007-2010 triennium were valued and seen as important, helpful and appropriate.
- 3 The question of content and timing in the planning and presenting of new programme themes should be re-examined. Keeping focus on the primary core values of IFUW, themes should be developed as a result of discussions and findings from the Triennial Conference and other interactive communication methods.
- 4 The current membership, as well as the leadership, is ageing and needs the infusion of young women who are committed to the mission and vision of IFUW. The need for membership recruitment, particularly in the *35 and under* category, is a significant issue.
- 5 IFUW should create more opportunities for members to interact with the website and use it as a resource for information and knowledge sharing.
- 6 IFUW should develop a Strategic Plan that looks beyond a 3-5 years window and builds in opportunities for NFAs and individual members to have new ways of communication with IFUW and others.

As a result of the survey, there has been a change in the method for developing the IFUW PfA for the next triennium. Discussion group consultation has taken place over the past year, the results of which will be combined with output from the Conference to develop the 2011 to 2013 PfA. Much of the work will be done at the Conference itself, thereby addressing the concerns in conclusion 3. The other conclusions should be borne in mind by future Boards.

IFUW Finances

IFUW continues to rely almost exclusively on dues for its income, despite suggestions to explore other funding possibilities. A major concern is the general decline in membership within NFAs, which has contributed to a steady decline in income. Despite this, however, IFUW has managed to retain most of the services that it offers to members, and to expand others such as the discussion groups.

A feature of the triennium has been the adoption of a new accounting system that allows IFUW to use 'functional' (or departmental) accounting, which clearly indicates on 'what' its money has been spent. This provides a more flexible framework for making changes to IFUW structures and services according to the priorities identified by the membership.

IFUW's finances remain sound, thanks to the enormous effort made by the staff to cut costs. However, the financial crisis has had an impact on the bottom line. The investment portfolio lost 20%

of its value, although it has recovered over 60% of that loss to date. The result of the devaluation of the investment portfolio was a huge technical loss in 2008, although a reasonable profit in 2009, but the reality is that when exchange rate losses and gains are taken out of the calculations, IFUW made a profit in 2008 and a loss in 2009, and the Finance Committee expects a much larger loss in 2010.

The new functional accounting will enable IFUW to determine what is important and where it wishes to spend its money. The diminishing income means that services or programmes will have to be cut in future, unless the income increases, and this will only happen with a growth in membership or an increase in dues, preferably both.

The Board and the Finance Committee have proposed a deficit budget for the triennium on the basis that money will have to be spent on new initiatives designed to increase the services of IFUW and thereby grow the membership, as the current methods and services have not enabled IFUW to sustain its membership, let alone grow.

Bina Roy Partners in Development

The Bina Roy Partners in Development (BRPID) programme underwent a major reconstruction and is no longer linked to dues payment. Instead it is a system for providing grants for project implementation on a competitive basis, which aims to increase NFA skills in project development. Some very interesting projects are already being implemented and hopefully it will be possible for more NFAs to make successful applications in the future. The grant making process has been supported in the first instance with some of the IFUW reserves. This support is being phased out over the next triennium and the programme will have to become entirely dependent on donations.

Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displaced Women Graduates

The Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displaced Women Graduates has been renamed to describe its purpose and function more accurately. During the triennium the committee has been working with displaced women in eight countries to assist them in finding employment, education and other support through the resources and resourcefulness of our members. While grants have been made available in accordance with the strict criteria laid down by the fund, other women have been helped by the committee and the wider membership.

Fellowships

In the 2008-2009 competition the Fellowships committee awarded 18 grants totalling approximately 80,000 Swiss Francs. Because of the difficulties of the present system of running the competition in the same year as the conference, it is proposed to move the competition to take place in the middle of the triennium.

IFUW in the international arena

IFUW has a long history of collaboration with the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and with other women's organizations.

IFUW's activities in relation to its consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNICEF and UNESCO have focussed on the priorities referred to above. Of particular note has been the work carried out by the Geneva Team at the Human Rights Council and the UNESCO Team in Paris. In addition IFUW has benefitted greatly from the work of its teams in New York and Vienna and other members of the Federation that have represented the Federation at a variety of meetings. The Board greatly appreciates and values the work of volunteer coordinators, team members and others as well as the staff who have provided the necessary support.

Achievements during the past triennium include:

- Strong delegations to the 52nd, 53rd and 54th Sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, including making an oral statement at the 54th Session and three successful IFUW seminars as part of the NGO programme;
- Three meetings with gender policy leaders at UNICEF Headquarters;
- Promotion of the Girl Child issues and Human Rights Education with UNICEF who in 2010 have an e-learning course available on the latter;
- Participation in the successful UNIFEM campaign *Say No to Violence*.

It has become increasingly evident that the role of NGOs is gradually diminishing in many UN meetings. Maintaining a strong presence will require continued vigilance and efforts to find new ways to strengthen IFUW's work with the various parts of the UN system. IFUW has a 'unique selling point', insofar as the Federation is the only organization with a particular focus on the needs and perspectives of graduate women; this must be used to its fullest advantage.

Membership – a continuing concern

Despite efforts during the triennium by the Membership committee to provide support to NFAs in difficulty, IFUW experienced the loss of 17 NFAs during the triennium. This can be attributed to the combined impact of the de-linkage of the BRPID programme from dues, the changes in the dues structure that were approved at the 29th Conference, and the impact of the world financial crisis.

While it is imperative that IFUW receives sufficient income from membership dues, it also needs to have a diverse membership in order to be truly international. Regrettably, but not unexpectedly, most of the NFAs that lost membership are from smaller and poorer countries. In the longer term, loss of these members could have a negative effect on our consultative status and credibility with the various UN bodies. It is, moreover, a situation that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and the Board and Finance Committee are therefore proposing, as a first step that the Membership Committee moderate a discussion on the need for a more diverse group of NFAs, the sustainability of small NFAs and suggestions for dues payment interventions, including twinning and other methods.

Communication and visibility

Communication between an international organization and its members is always difficult given distances, both physical and in time zones. Particularly during this triennium, IFUW has made great strides in improving its communication using modern technology. The website has been updated and email has been used extensively for communications with NFAs and with and between individual members. Some NFAs use the IFUW website to host their own NFA webpage, constantly updating activities. This has had wide implications in continuing to keep communication costs down and we are particularly grateful to Plantagenet Ltd, the company that provides IFUW's website and email server free of charge. The on-line discussions have been enhanced and greatly expanded which has appealed particularly to younger and independent members. These discussions moderated by the Status of Women Committee and other volunteers, included topics such as education, women's economic empowerment, multigenerational leadership and women's health. These initiatives have addressed item 5 of the membership survey mentioned above.

It is encouraging to see that there has been greater communication among members at the regional meetings. In the case of Europe, with shorter distances that have to be travelled and the ease of getting from country to country, University Women of Europe (UWE) are able to meet annually. In addition, both the Federation of University Women of Africa and the University Women of Asia have met twice during the triennium. The Pacific Graduate Women's Network has met twice electronically. The Canadian Federation of University Women, an unofficial 'region' of its own, uses teleconferencing

for its mid-year meeting while retaining an annual AGM in different parts of the country each year. This is an innovation that could be replicated in other regions in the future, thereby increasing communication on issues of mutual interest. Whenever possible, and within IFUW's financial constraints, members of the Board have attended regional meetings and visited NFAs.

Thanks are due to IFUW staff

IFUW's dedicated staff has worked exceptionally hard over the past three years to provide members with a wide range of services, including electronic updates and more communications of general interest. Of great benefit was the revision of the IFUW website and enhancement of internet networking. In addition, they have all worked meticulously to ensure that expenditures have been kept within budget wherever possible, often taking on additional responsibilities. The Board is extremely grateful to them all.

Possible future directions

The Board has taken the first steps toward developing a sustainable international programme approach. It was a learning process, one which created some tension and frustration. The involvement of Committee Conveners in the first planning process was positive, but we need to find ways for closer integration and coordination with the committees in the future.

More work has been carried out virtually this triennium, by the Board, Committees and the special working groups. Given the diminishing resources of IFUW, this is a trend that is likely to increase. Careful review is needed to assess the advantages, the gaps and the obstacles in working this way as guidance for the future. The Federation has already noted that virtual work is more successful when groups are given short-term, clearly defined tasks.

The use of the on-line Programme Survey was also an innovation, which gave more members an opportunity to give feedback on the viability and relevance of IFUW's PfA and to share their views as to the method for its development. This in turn will provide an important role for the Conference participants in Mexico and will hopefully lead to greater 'ownership' of the PfA by the membership.

As this report is being written, the Board is conscious that the number of members participating in the forthcoming triennial conference is further declining, accelerating the trend of the two preceding ones. Efforts to adapt the governance of IFUW and the development of activities will need to continue to ensure that all NFAs are able to participate fully. This is obviously of concern to members, as has been demonstrated in the discussions that have taken place on e-voting. Many challenges remain ahead.

The IFUW Board of Officers 2007-2010
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