



International Federation of University Women wants concerted government action to drastically increase female literacy rates

Geneva, Switzerland, 08 September 2013 – On the occasion of International Literacy Day on September 8, the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)), based in Geneva, Switzerland, calls on national governments to provide new policies, funding, technologies and partnerships to boost female literacy rates, and more specifically to assist vulnerable women in gaining literacy skills. Two-thirds of the world's nearly 800 million illiterate adults are women, representing a sizable proportion of the world's population.¹

Only 40% of Pakistani women over the age of 15 can read and write, compared to 70% of men. In Tanzania, one third of women – more than 4 million women in total – are not literate. In Bolivia, 30% of adult women cannot read and write, compared to just 5% of men. In Yemen, women living in urban areas are almost three times as likely to be literate as women living in rural areas.²

“Literacy, and female literacy in particular, liberates people from the shackles of poverty and accelerates a nation's advancement,” said IFUW president Catherine Bell. “Literacy enables human dignity by giving people increased autonomy as well as the ability to earn a livelihood.”

Basic literacy skills are the cornerstone of development and are crucial for social and political participation. Literacy helps to eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, curb population growth, achieve gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy.³

There is a positive relationship between improved female literacy and opportunities for girls in secondary education. Every year in which fewer girls than boys get to school will increase the number of adult women who are not literate. Failure to ensure girls' access to school increases the transmission of poverty and illiteracy from generation to generation.⁴

The International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls' and women's global organization run by and for women, advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels.

¹ UNESCO

² Key Messages and Data on Girls' and Women's Education and Literacy UNESCO 2012

³ UNESCO

⁴ Literacy and Empowerment, Professor Emeritus Lalage Bown, University of Glasgow

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