

03/2016

# policyUPDATE

October 2016



## What is World Teachers' Day?

World Teachers' Day is celebrated every year on 5th October. The day is a chance to appreciate teachers as the single most influential and powerful force for equity, access and quality in education and promote their status to this end. World Teachers' Day is also an opportunity for the voices of teachers to be heard in the debate on quality education, as full professional partners in decision-making processes and to participate in the global dialogue on education needs. The Day was established to mark the adoption of the landmark 1966 Recommendation on the Status of the Teaching Profession<sup>1</sup>, 50 years ago this year. Following this Recommendation, Teachers' value and status has been reaffirmed in a number of additional legal instruments and declarations, including the Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel<sup>2</sup>. Recognition of the status of teachers was taken to a higher level through the Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum (WEF) in May 2015 and through the Oslo Summit on Education for Development in July 2015<sup>3</sup>; 160



countries committed to ensure that teachers and educators are empowered through the roadmap for the new education agenda, the [Education 2030 Framework for Action](#). Harnessing this multilateral commitment to bring about visible change for educators in decent working conditions, safe teaching environments and professional autonomy needs to be adequately financed and monitored. The 2016 World Teachers' Day theme of "Valuing Teachers, Improving their Status" reflects the advocacy focus of Graduate Women International (GWI) on this critical human component of quality education, and serves to draw global attention to this issue.

*"Teachers are essential for dignity and rights, for the health of societies, for inclusive and sustainable development. Nothing can substitute for a good teacher."*

- IRINA BOKOVA, DIRECTOR GENERAL, UNESCO.

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## Why do teachers matter?

*"Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition."*

- JACQUES BARZUN, HISTORIAN AND EDUCATOR.

In September 2015 when the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to alleviate global poverty by 2030, education was recognised as essential for the success of all 17 of its goals. The Education 2030 Framework for Action, highlights the fact that teachers are fundamental for equitable and quality education and, as such, must be *"adequately trained, recruited and remunerated, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems"*. GWI aligns its advocacy and activities to support the achievement of SDG4, Quality Education, which pledges to *"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for*

*all."* There is a specific focus on teachers in SDG Implementation Goal 4c that says by 2030, *"States should substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States."*

While teachers are the torchbearers to the means of implementing education goals they must also serve as key society leaders who implement effective learning practices and create fair and informed development, including technology modernisation, helps teachers effectively manage changing education contexts. GWI recognises that women teachers hold unique social influence as they shape the next generation of young women. The

proportion of female teachers is an important indicator of progress towards gender equality. Yet, women made up 43% of primary teachers in sub-Saharan Africa in 2012 and only 31% of secondary teachers<sup>4</sup>. In this region there is a strong correlation between female teachers and increased girls' participation, retention and success in schooling, since women teachers are less likely to perpetuate gender discrimination, gender-based violence against girl students and sexual harassment. GWI encourages support of female role models in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as they provide an incentive for young women to take up these subjects. Regarding indigenous women teachers, GWI fully supports their training and deployment combined with flexible schooling to better enable access for isolated or vulnerable girls.

*"And when it comes to developing the high standards we need, it's time to stop working against our teachers and start working with them. Teachers don't go in to education to get rich. They don't go in to education because they don't believe in their children. They want their children to succeed, but we've got to give them the tools. Invest in early childhood education. Invest in our teachers and our children will succeed."*

- BARACK OBAMA, U.S. PRESIDENT.

# What challenges do *teachers face?*

GWI strongly believes that teachers – skilled professionals performing one of the most important jobs in society – should be treated with the same degree of respect as other specialised professions, such as a doctor. Yet, the Varkey Foundation Global Teacher Status Index<sup>5</sup> shows that, of the 21 countries surveyed, only in China did society view teachers as having equal status with doctors. In the UK, fewer than 5% of respondents thought teachers had an equivalent status. Despite efforts to recognise teachers' value and rights through international legislation and recommendations, the UK continues to face challenges brought about by staff shortages, poor training and low status. Strong societies depend on well-educated citizens and a well-trained workforce. The quality of teachers and their continuing professional development remain central to the achievement of quality education. Yet today, the number and quality of teachers, pre-service and in-service training, are facing serious systemic challenges across the world. GWI believes that these challenges can be addressed through investment in a systemic approach to education and

teacher development systems in ways that also incorporate the accelerating role of ICT<sup>6</sup>.

Teachers are not simply a conduit through which education flows. Content, pedagogical approach and learning conditions all have a powerful effect on what is learned. If teachers are not adequately equipped this will directly impact the content of the education they deliver. The lack of remuneration, overcrowded classrooms, sexual harassment or abuse combined with a lack of respect from school leaders and community members, school violence and the deficient resources all contribute to teacher difficult working conditions. Supporting teachers in conflict and displaced societies is becoming an increasingly urgent need. Disturbingly, an estimated 36% of out of school children are living in conflict-affected areas<sup>7</sup>. GWI is gravely concerned over this reality and raises awareness of the vast number of teachers needed to deliver education in such volatile or poorly resourced conditions.



Challenging conditions like these are highly demotivating for teachers. Kirk, Dembélé, and Baxter, (2013)<sup>8</sup> have noted three important teacher characteristics, all of which are critical to effective teaching performance. Many teachers come to the profession through necessity not choice, and may therefore lack a strong professional identity or desire to strengthen that identity. Since teacher efficacy strongly correlates with teacher performance, poorly trained and motivated teachers lack efficacy. In some fragile contexts, even when professional development opportunities exist, it simply may be too dangerous for teachers to attend them. Lack of motivation to participate in professional development can stem from personal and financial motivation; and may ultimately lead to teachers resisting change of any sort, reflecting on the education system as a whole.

*"Compassionate teachers fill a void left by working parents who aren't able to devote enough attention to their children. Teachers don't just teach; they can be vital personalities who help young people to mature, to understand the world and to understand themselves. A good education consists of much more than useful facts and marketable skills."*

- CHARLES PLATT, AUTHOR, MAKE ELECTRONICS.

## What is GWI doing to promote the *status and value of teachers?*

GWI underscores that quality education depends on quality teachers training and continued supported. The organisation advocates for suitable and safe teacher working conditions, including a structured career path and ongoing professional development. GWI advocates at national level for states and policy makers to invest at least 6% of GDP in education<sup>9</sup>; to allocate funds for teacher training, recruitment, upskilling and increased salaries globally and to assure gender parity in all aspects of teacher recruitment, pay, training and deployment.

GWI is a member of the Collaborative for Harnessing Ambition and Resources for Girls' Education (CHARGE), which aims to unite efforts on girls' education behind five priorities that require urgent attention: Access; Safety; Quality Learning; Transitions; and Leadership. As an official partner of CHARGE, GWI pledges to increase the number of qualified female secondary school teachers in sub-Saharan Africa to provide girls with improved, high

quality learning opportunities. In addition, GWI will support the transition of girls from secondary school to university or work over the next five years through a mentoring programme. GWI honours this commitment and directly addresses the lack of women teachers as a barrier to girls' education through its Teachers for Rural Futures project, which supports girls to attain a university degree as a qualified secondary school teachers. The girls then return to their rural communities as qualified teachers and ambassadors for girls' education.

Through campaigning at the international level and advocacy through human rights mechanisms such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the United Nations Human Rights Council, GWI advocates for recognition of teacher status, particularly women teachers, as pivotal agents of change in a unique position of influence between girls, their parents and the surrounding community to promote positive social influence and role modeling.

## What can NFAs do?

### At the national level:

- Raise the profile of women teachers around World Teachers Day through social media, activities and visibility.
- Advocate for decent pay and career opportunities for women teachers.
- Advocate for gender parity of women teachers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and information and communications technology (ICTs), to close the gender gap within STEM professions and increase innovation.
- Encourage the inclusion of gender sensitivity in curricula and staff training in order to raise awareness and support change towards more gender responsive social attitudes.
- Guarantee that women teachers' rights and responsibilities are upheld in.
- Advocate for quality teacher training pre service and in service, with regular and relevant ongoing professional development opportunities, including ICT training to meet changing education contexts.

### At institutional and community level NFAs can:

- Foster networks amongst education institutions to actively encourage the path of women and girls to decision-making roles in education.
- Ensure that pre-service and in-service teacher training reflects the local needs of women teachers and students.

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