

Press Release

Graduate Women International (GWI) calls for all governments, regional and international policy makers to take all steps necessary to eradicate illiteracy as a key step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5

Geneva, Switzerland, 08 September 2015 – On International Literacy Day, [Graduate Women International \(GWI\)](#) calls for all governments, regional and international policy makers to take the steps necessary to eradicate illiteracy in view of achieving Goals 4 and 5 of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), which aim to provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all and attain gender equality, empowering women and girls everywhere respectively. As well as a basic human right for men and women, literacy is a catalyst for sustainable development and a prerequisite for learning the knowledge, skills and values required for creating sustainable societies.

All programmes for action must recognise and make provision for the vulnerability of girls and women, who account for two-thirds of the 756 million illiterate people in the world.¹ Girls and women are disproportionately affected by illiteracy, which perpetuates their position of socio-economic vulnerability and dependency, and further exacerbates the global gap in gender equality. Technology offers greater opportunity to access education for all groups of society, especially for rural, indigenous and disabled girls and women, to be included in literacy campaigns. Reading, writing and numeracy skills are an essential building block for all levels of education beyond primary, from secondary to tertiary and continuing education.

GWI President Catherine Bell highlighted the synergy between literacy and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, emphasising that “Literacy is a critical link in accessing education, and through education development. Girls and women who know how to read and write are more likely to lift themselves out of poverty, improve their and their families’ health, and sustain long term employment. Governments must make a priority of tackling illiteracy and ensuring that all girls and women have access to education.”

Graduate Women International (GWI) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls’ and women’s global organisation advocating for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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¹ Adult and Youth Literacy Fact sheet 2015, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/fs32-2015-literacy.pdf>