



Graduate Women
International (GWI)

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On World Literacy Day 2016, Graduate Women International addresses the digital divide and the advantages of ICT availability to girls and women worldwide

Geneva, Switzerland, 08 September 2016 - On International Literacy Day, Graduate Women International (GWI) calls for digital literacy for girls and women to be recognised as integral to modern literacy. Two thirds of the 758 million illiterate adults worldwide are women¹. Inability to read or write remains a crippling challenge, leading to a cycle of poverty and exclusion. With digital connectivity expanding, it is essential that literacy comprises knowledge of digital devices such as smartphones, tablets and computers, in addition to reading, writing and numeracy skills. Outreach to girls and women in all sectors of society, including older women, refugees and the disabled, must be developed through multi-stakeholder co-operation, in infrastructure-building, education and policymaking, in order to avoid further marginalisation of vulnerable or isolated groups.

Despite growing internet coverage, digital divides still exist worldwide, with women commonly less able to benefit from access to devices or the internet. In South Asia, for instance, women are 38% less likely to own a mobile phone than men for a variety of reasons, including lack of control over finances and decision-making². Social and cultural barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing digital technology needs addressing by policy makers, governments and civil society. Technology needs to be made affordable to all, since prohibitive broadband costs limit access; only 7% of households in least developed countries have internet access, compared with the world average of 46%³.

GWI asserts that information and communications technology (ICT) growth must be leveraged to ensure greater prosperity for all. ICTs can bridge formal and informal learning; help teachers improve education quality with online materials; and prepare students for work through use as a research and presentation tool. The advantages of literacy, combined with mobile connectivity, can empower women economically and socially. Access to market prices can help women with small businesses, and independent information can mean greater participation in governance. The combination of education with digital literacy encourages women's contribution to decision-making that will affect them and their families positively.

GWI President Catherine Bell states: 'For sustainable development and increased prosperity for all, it is critical that the advantages of digital literacy are made freely available and accessible to girls and women of all countries and all means, hand-in-hand with conventional literacy education.'

¹ UNESCO ILD <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/ILD-2016-UNESCO-DG-message-en.pdf>

² The Internet Society, 2015 <https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/asia-pacific-bureau/2015/07/can-mobile-internet-bridge-gender-digital-divide-lessons-our-aprifg>

³ ITU statistics 2015 <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2015.pdf>



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Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international nongovernmental organisation (NGO) based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 80 countries. 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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For more information please contact: Amy Paunila

T: +41 22 731 23 80; Email: ap@graduatewomen.org