



Graduate Women  
International (GWI)

# Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**On the 51<sup>st</sup> International Literacy Day, GWI draws attention to literacy as a foundational means for women and girls' effective participation within societies and economies**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 8 September 2018**—In collaboration with International Literacy Day (ILD), Graduate Women International (GWI) is raising awareness of the importance of adult and child literacy, highlighting the issues surrounding literacy development. ILD, first celebrated in 1967, continues to provide the opportunity to highlight literacy development progress as well as mobilise the international community to endorse literacy as a powerful instrument enabling women and girls to achieve empowerment and self-development. This year's theme, "Literacy and Skills Development", explores connections between literacy and technical and vocational skills in policies, practice, systems and governance.

"Education is a prevailing means of empowerment for women and girls around the world and a fundamental enabler to achieving peace, stability and human development. GWI is resolute in actively advancing literacy and skills development, while ensuring potential barriers, such as illiteracy, will not negatively impact women and young girls' educational potential nor on their professional opportunities and ultimately on their wellbeing and that of their communities", says GWI President, Geeta Desai.

Notable data connects illiteracy and severe poverty, as well as illiteracy and prejudice against women. At least 750 million adults, including 102 million young people (15-24 years old), lack basic literacy skills. Further, six out of every 10 children and adolescents (617 million) are failing to achieve the minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics resulting in the exclusion of low-literate women and girls from fully participating within their communities and societies. Indeed, certain groups disadvantaged by illiteracy, such as women, are less likely to participate in the labour market, having less chance of finding employment and hence having a decreased likelihood of achieving stability in their lives.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly 4 and 5, that together are to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning (SDG4) and achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG5), it is necessary to recognise literacy as a human right and as a cornerstone for development. Literacy unlocks human potential: it builds capacity and empowers women and girls to gain self-growth. Literacy improves labour markets and advances people's lives, work and general well-being, ultimately contributing to more equitable and sustainable societies. Illiteracy eradication is crucial to achieving the 17 SDGs that aim to "leave no one behind". GWI calls on policymakers to develop tools and policies that combine literacy, technical and vocational skills, and employability and entrepreneurial skills with the vision of achieving literacy for women and young girls.

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 60 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 since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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Contributing to this press release is GWI summer intern, Olivia Flett, University of Manchester.

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