

WFWP: Empowering women as peacebuilders and leaders in the community

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"Empowering women as peacebuilders and leaders in the family to transform the community, nation and world. Through education, advocacy, partnership, reconciliation and humanitarian service, WFWPI aims to create an environment of peace and well-being for future generations and people of all races, cultures and religious creeds." WFWPI mission statement

According to a [2017 UNESCO study](#), more than half of all school-aged children and adolescents around the world lack basic mathematics and reading skills, although two thirds of them are going to school. The challenge is providing good quality and inclusive education for all children, including the poorest and most vulnerable, but how can this be achieved?

In search of answers, the Center for SDG Global Education USA and its partners organized the fourth annual Education Solutions International Conference under the theme of "Empowering educators and ensuring inclusivity and equality on education in community classrooms" on July 17-19, 2019 in New York City.

The conference, which brought together education stakeholders and civil society actors from around the world, was held as a side event of the [2019 High-Level Political Forum](#), the central platform used by the United Nations to monitor and review the SDGs. One of the six goals the forum zeroed in on this year was SDG 4 (quality education), which was the focus of the Education Solutions conference.

The SDGs are based on a shared vision of what world leaders want the world to be like in the future – a future that is secure, sustainable and based on equality of all people both between nations and within nations. Amina J. Mohammed, a Nigerian woman appointed by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon as the UN Special Advisor on Post-2015 Development Planning, stated that "it is difficult to convey just what an achievement it has been to have all 193 nations of the UN to agree on these goals." She described the SDGs as "a promise made in faith" and argued that although the vision is unlikely to be achieved by all nations by the end of 2030, that does not excuse any nation from not trying their utmost to aim for that goal.

Coming from the grassroots level, Dr. Ada Okika, executive director of the Center for SDG Global Education USA, gave clear examples of how hard it is to work in some countries because there is no infrastructure to deal with education at a certain level. Even though people are empowered when they are educated well, if we can't empower the mothers and women, it is hard to empower our children.

"If you want to change society, educate the women," reiterated Dr. Michael Merrill, professor of Professional Practice and director of Rutgers University Labor Education Action Research Network. Dr. Merrill encouraged everyone to think about the role of education in a democracy and its place in developing sustainable goals. Education is a leading indicator of democracy, he argued, adding that women should always have a role in discussing and setting policies on how to take care of the community. He ended with a call for lifelong learning: "We must always find money to spend on educating ourselves at every age; use every day to learn. Whatever we do is about teaching and learning."

Former Under Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations, Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, recognized that we need lifelong learning as it applies to the SDG 4 targets, which is currently a process that stands in isolation, and there is no agreed path for our children. The reality is, he argued, our children don't understand their global connection. What can make education substantial? True global citizens with an ethical and moral understanding of peace. Women must be partners and guide that process, if we are to have sustainable development and peace.



This reminded me of the written statement WFWPI submitted at the 63rd CSW earlier this year:

"Women face difficult or dangerous situations worldwide and are often unable to see beyond the daily survival and safety of their families and themselves. National and international programs, as well as efforts from civil society and non-governmental organizations, offer support and provide resources for women to aspire further than their immediate barriers.

In addition, young women have a vital role to play. As stated in the context of Security Council Resolution 1325, they need a place at the decision-making table to ensure that the needs of all women and girls are being addressed in policy making. According to United Nations Women, when women are included in decisions, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability of that resolve lasting at least 15 years.

Non-governmental organizations occupy a privileged position as mediators between governments providing social protections and those that benefit from them. They provide programs fostering health, education and leadership aspirations, which guide women and girls to take responsibility for transformation in their families, communities and eventually ownership of the goals of the United Nations."

Following Ambassador Chowdhury's speech, the discussion continued with Dr. Okika advocating for more effective learning environments. Classroom teachers are not trained to be sensitive to global understanding, she explained, adding that we must use our collective wisdom to move forward.

Dr. Seung Jae Lee, an associate professor at Kyung Hae University, expressed the need for vertical structure in education. Passing down inheritance through education is a path of opportunity, she said. In South Korea and many other countries around the world, children's education is a priority. She

emboldened us to keep working towards our goals for sustainable development by suggesting that we keep our feet planted firmly on the ground, don't lose our inner battles, and continue to work with new ideas.



Representing WFP USA as senior vice president, I spoke about the importance of educating women in the family and shared about my personal experiences as a social worker. Touching on the five pillars of the UN sustainable development agenda, commonly referred to as the "5 Ps", I emphasized 'people' as the overarching P that takes responsibility for all the others (planet, partnership, peace and prosperity).

As the conference came to a close, all the participants, including top level UN officials, political leaders, teachers, and heads of non-profit organizations, agreed that to reach the grassroots through women will ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning. As an international women's organization, WFP has developed and promoted grassroots humanitarian projects such as building and maintaining schools, character education, vocational centers, foster parents' projects, scholarship funds, microcredit programs and more, in more than 100 countries over the past 25 years.

The first time I had ever attended a conference at the UN was in 1986. It seems that many of the worthy proposals brought forth at that time did not come to fruition. However, I am a believer in SDG 4 because of its grassroots involvement. Every sector of society was represented at this event and I was happy to participate as a speaker. After attending this conference, my confidence in the UN was rekindled.



4th Education Solutions International Conference

2019 United Nations High Level Political Forum Side Event

July 17-18, 2019
US Salvation Army UN
Headquarters Auditorium
221 East 52nd Street,
New York NY
9:00AM

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
at the Margins of the United Nations
High Level Political Forum

— Theme —
Empowering Educators
And Ensuring Inclusivity
And Equality On
Education In Community
Classrooms



High-level
Political Forum
9-18 July 2019