

WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

Girls' and young women's empowerment

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) believes that girls and young women must be at the centre of all policy and programme developments that aim to ensure their empowerment. WAGGGS is committed to providing activities and the appropriate space to empower girls and young women to discover their full potential. The present and the future of humankind are in the hands of our young and future generations and in particular in the hands of girls and young women. As the voice of girls and young women, WAGGGS has identified the UN Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out, emphasizing the need to ensure girls' and young women's empowerment.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 145 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy, education and action. We aim to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, as well as empower young women to speak out for themselves and for other girls. Our global action theme 'together we can change our world' encourages WAGGGS members to take actions to help achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals.

WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to help girls and young women develop self-confidence and self-esteem by:

- **Providing** a safe and supportive environment in which girls and young women can cultivate their own set of values and grow in confidence
- **Supporting** girls' organizations which create a safe space for girls and young women and foster positive, close relationships with adult mentors and peers
- **Increasing** commitment and action on empowering girls and young women as a priority
- **Advocating** that the media, including new communication technologies, promote positive images of women and girls
- **Involving** men and boys in dialogues on gender roles and encouraging positive interaction with women and girls
- **Tackling** cultural gender discrimination and promoting gender equality
- Collaborating and working with each other through coalitions to promote girls empowerment.
- Monitoring and Evaluating progress in order to further progress in the field of girls empowerment.
- **WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:**
- **Work** in partnership with other NGOs, including boys' groups, faith-based organizations and the media
- **Continue to develop** age-appropriate activities that are effective in girls' empowerment, such as sports and vocational training. These activities may not only increase self-esteem, but also develop critical life skills, including teamwork, communication and respect for others
- **Encourage** Girl Guides and Girl Scouts to get involved in IT, science, maths, sports and technology. Build these subjects into the programme and find ways to motivate girls and young women to participate.
- **Critique** and challenge the harmful stereotypical use of images in the media, that negatively affect girls and young women
- **Provide** diversity training for leaders to help them to better meet the needs of all girls
- **Provide** leadership training and opportunities for girls and young women.
- **Lobby** governments to emphasize the importance of organizations that enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential
- **Listen to girls!** Create a safe space where girls are empowered to share their views and experiences with respect and dignity

How WAGGGS is supporting girls to discover their potential:

- The World Association provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence, life skills and leadership.
- WAGGGS' vision is to be the voice of girls and young women to build a better world; and one of our key messages is for girls to *discover their potential*.
- WAGGGS aims not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.
- WAGGGS supports girls and young women to discover their potential through non-formal education based on

the four pillars of lifelong learning¹:

- WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to know*, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth in a few subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities all forms of education provide throughout life.
- WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to do* in order to acquire not only occupational skills but also a broad range of life skills including inter personal and team relationships.
- WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to live together*, developing an understanding of other people, an appreciation of interdependence, skills in team work and conflict resolution, and a deep respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace and justice.
- WAGGGS enables girls and young women to *learn to be*, so as to better develop one's character and act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect in the development of a young person's potential.

¹ The Education of Young People, A statement at the dawn of the 21st century, WAGGGS, WOSM, YMCA, YWCA, IFRC, IAA

CASE STUDY

Girl Scouts of the USA - DOVE Self-Esteem Programme

A study by the Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) Girl Scout Research Institute, *The New Normal? What Girls Say about Healthy Living* found that girls define their health in holistic terms, and place equal value on emotional and physical well-being. *Uniquely ME!* GSUSA, DOVE self-esteem programme helps girls to feel better about themselves by helping them develop the skills necessary to face life's challenges.

- Forty-eight percent of *Uniquely Me!* participants were from low-income families
- Girl Scout Councils worked in collaboration with more than 550 organizations and individuals in their communities through *Uniquely Me!*
- Sixty-four percent of *Uniquely Me!* participants felt better about themselves after the programme than before.

“If we do not encourage others to find their own meaning, their own voice, we will never be able to sustain our own.”

Peter Block, Author and Consultant on Empowerment

Girls' Empowerment Globally

- Girls' empowerment entails a process whereby girls gain more control over their lives, become active members of their communities and are able to make informed choices about issues that directly affect them. As the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child upholds, children are neither the property of their parents nor are they helpless objects of charity².
- Supporting the empowerment of girls entails addressing the barriers that prevent them from developing their full potential, and providing girl-friendly spaces for interaction with their peers. Discrimination against girls and young women can be based on class, race, ethnicity and age. Barriers include **unequal** power relations, limited opportunities for education, inadequate access to health care and services, cultural biases and poor economic conditions³.
- The third UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) focuses on gender equality and empowerment as central to meeting the needs of the world's poorest and most marginalized people. It aims to increase girls' and young women's participation in society, and in so doing contribute to global poverty reduction efforts⁴.
- In its publication, the *State of the World's Children 2011*, UNICEF states that: 'In addition to being a fundamental right, participation stimulates the full development of the personality and evolving capacities of the child. Through meaningful civic engagement, young people can learn about their rights, explore a spectrum of social relations and prepare to be active citizens of the future, bringing energy, enthusiasm and fresh perspectives to the development of their communities (UNICEF, 2011, p.7)⁵.
- In *Change It Up – What Girls say about Redefining Leadership*, the Girl Guide Research Institute identified that more than 9 out of ten girls either want to be or would not mind being leaders. This means that fewer than 1 out of 10 girls flatly reject leadership as an aspiration and self-perception for themselves⁶.

² UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. For more information: http://www.unicef.org/crc/index_protecting.html or UN Secretary General's Report, Commission on the Status of Women, 55th Session, march 2011: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2011/27

³ UNICEF (2007). *State of the World's Children – Women & Children*. New York. For more information: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNICEF (2011). *State of the World's Children – Adolescence*. New York, For more information: <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2011/fullreport.php>

⁶ Girl Scouts USA (2008) *Change It Up! What Girls Say About Redefining Leadership*. New York. For more information:

http://www.girlscouts.org/research/pdf/change_it_up_executive_summary_english.pdf and http://www.girlscouts.org/research/publications/girlleadership/transforming_leadership_continued.asp