



World Association
of Girl Guides
and Girl Scouts

Association mondiale
des Guides et des
Eclaireuses

Asociación
Mundial de las
Guías Scouts

WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

Young women and girls ensuring a sustainable environment

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 environmental sustainability. In many countries around the world girls and young women are more immediately affected by climate change in their day-to-day activities and as a result they have the motivation to become powerful agents of change. 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 7 to ensure environmental sustainability as a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out.

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 actively include the participation and empowerment of girls and young women in climate change and environmental sustainability processes by:

- **Guaranteeing** the implementation of Article 3 of the UN Climate Change Convention, which states: "The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities".
- **Streamlining** sustainable development with special focus on girls and young women across all policies and implementation processes as well as budget allocation.
- **Investing** in girls and young women through allocating a fair percentage of climate change adaptation and mitigation budgets to Ministries of Education, Youth and Gender to support the local actions of girls and young women in their communities.
- **Allocating** funds for training and resources to build the capacity and knowledge base of young women and girls through both formal and non-formal Climate Change education.
- **Ensuring** equitable representation and participation of young women and girls in the fight against climate change, inclusive of all segments of society in decision-making at all levels.

- **Acknowledging** the fundamental role of young women in poverty reduction strategies toward environmental sustainability, designing creative tools to adapt to degraded ecosystems.¹
- **Adopting** a Human Rights based approach to climate change and environmental policy and enhancing democratic and participatory initiatives that help girls and women. Women and men have a right to the environmental conditions they need to enjoy their fundamental human rights.
- **Ensuring** equitable access to water, sanitation, clean energy, safe shelter and locally-grown food for all girls, young women and their families thereby increasing their ability to remain in school and gainful employment.
- **Engaging** with and empowering girls and young women to conduct research on the quality of the environment and to communicate their findings to the larger community.
- **Prioritizing** partnership with existing youth, young women's and children's organizations. Effective participation refers to the possibilities of speaking, being listened to, taking action and being valued, rather than simply to numerical participation.
- **Developing** a plan and allocating resources toward implementation of the amended New Delhi work programme on Article 6 as agreed by the Parties at COP16.²
- **Planning** for inclusion of girls on an equal basis in association with Article 12 of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the right of children to participate in decision-making that is relevant to their lives.

WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:

- **Deliver** non-formal education programmes to girls and young women to enable them to take an active part in shaping and ensuring a sustainable environment for young and future generations.
- **Promote** a sustainable lifestyle that takes into account what impact our actions have on our natural and social environment.
- **Use** non-formal education to raise awareness on the right to safe and sufficient water and the right of everyone to an environment that is adequate for general health and well-being.
- **Highlight** environmental values as part of the Girl Guiding and Girl Scouting method.
- **Develop** skills to gain access to and control over resources and their benefits, especially among girls and young women in rural areas and other marginalized communities. Environmental knowledge and practices translated into life-skills will help to shift traditionally subordinate relationships of women to men in resource management.
- **Encourage** and create platforms for intergenerational dialogue, exchange and mentoring with the aim to build a sustainable society. Create platforms to exchange ideas as well as learning from older women, including those from indigenous traditions, who can strengthen the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of girls.
- **Develop** and expand North-South and South-South partnerships to help alleviate many of the world's environmental problems, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and exhaustion of fishery resources and water.
- **Advocate** for local governments to enhance education of girls and young women with practical knowledge of the skills needed to achieve environmental sustainability.

How WAGGGS is addressing the challenges related to environmental sustainability

- WAGGGS empowers young women to participate in decision-making. For example, every year since 2009, WAGGGS has taken a youth delegation to the UNFCCC's Conference of Parties (COP) to lobby international decision-makers on behalf of girls and young women worldwide. At the COP events, our youth delegates develop campaign messages and run side events,

¹ UNDP. 2009. Resource Guide on Gender and Climate change. Page 29.

² unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/sbi/eng/l26.pdf

workshops, discussions and many other campaigning activities. They talk to the media to raise awareness of girls and young women and climate change, and they work with other youth NGOs on running campaign actions. Youth delegates use this vital international advocacy training to implement environmental projects when they return home.

- WAGGGS has developed a number of non-formal education programmes on environmental sustainability in order to inform girls and young women about climate change, including the *Climate Change and Food Security badge curriculum*, the *Biodiversity badge curriculum* and the *Climate Change - take action now! Guide*. The Food Security and Climate Change badge has been distributed to more than 20,000 young people in schools and youth groups and the badge curriculum was downloaded more than 4,000 times from the WAGGGS website in 2010.
- WAGGGS is a founding member of the Youth and United Nations Global Alliance (YUNGA), a NGO network that coordinates efforts to achieve common goals such as eliminating hunger and poverty, ensuring gender equality, respecting the environment and providing better education for all. YUNGA develops publications, activity packs and other resources for children and young people such as the *Inspire and Educate* competitions.

Case Studies from Member Organizations

Cleaner cooking around the world

Girl Guides from Mexico and Wales have been working together on an anti-poverty and sustainable environment project that supported the marginalised Mazahua community in Mexico. Members of the community, where houses are made of wood and cardboard, normally cook on open wood fires, which cause air pollution and respiratory disease and consume unsustainable energy sources. The Girl Guides built Patsari stoves for 50 families in the community. Patsari stoves are off-the-floor stoves that use wood in a more sustainable way and are safer than cooking on open fires and are designed to reduce air pollution by 70 percent. This project will prevent respiratory problems and burns from cooking, and will mean girls and women carry lighter loads of wood.

In other countries meanwhile, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts are helping build safe solar cookers which convert sunlight to heat energy and can drastically reduce hunger, respiratory and waterborne diseases and deforestation, currently responsible for millions of premature deaths in Africa alone. Girls and young women train communities on how to build and use them and are educating people about changing their habits to ensure safer, greener and more prosperous lives. Solar Cookers International has been cooperating with WAGGGS since 1994 and already Girl Guides and Girl Scouts have worked with more than 100,000 families in 140 countries to introduce the benefits of solar cooking.

“Guides Say...” national survey and Clean Up Australia

Girl Guides Australia conducted a nationwide survey to identify top issues that girls and young women really care about. The “Guides Say...” project collected information from girls aged 5 to 17 with respondents from every State and Territory, including rural and remote areas. By conducting this survey, Girl Guides Australia gave the girls and young women in their country a voice and allowed them to speak in public on their behalf. It was one of the most extensive surveys of the views of girls conducted by any organization in Australia and it showed that the primary global concerns were global warming and environment.

These concerns have been addressed by Girl Guides Australia at grass root level by encouraging all Guide units each year to participate in Clean Up Australia, the biggest community-based environmental event in the country. Members take part by cleaning up and clearing rubbish in their local areas. This partnership evolved out of an informal relationship with Clean Up Australia over the last 20 years and the number of Guides participating has been increasing constantly. The Clean Up Australia partnership has now been extended to include the recycling of mobile phones, which will provide an additional source of income for both organizations.

“This is a simple but practical and effective way that girls and young women can care for their environment — something that they rated extremely highly in a Girl Guides Australia survey. It gives them opportunities to speak out about reducing our impact on the environment. It also assists Guides

and leaders to implement the MDGs and WAGGGS' Global Action Theme at a level which they are interested in and can understand." Miriam Holmes, Assistant Chief Commissioner, Girl Guides Australia.

"Today's young people will bear the consequences of climate change, thanks to the unfortunate legacy of their elders. In many developing countries, in particular, youth - especially girls and young women - are often responsible for farming, finding water and collecting fuel wood. These tasks will be rendered more difficult – and will take even more time away from education or productive activities – as climate change affects the availability of water, agricultural productivity and the survival of ecosystems. [...]"

Left unaddressed, climate change could cause an unravelling of the progress that has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and could also have serious implications for peace and security. Unless we make radical changes in the way we live, by the time the youth of 2008 reach my age, the world may well have become a rather inhospitable place."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, International Youth Day, 2008

"Our partnership with WAGGGS has enabled the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization to reach young people with its messages on food, security, hunger and the environment. Through our successful joint initiatives, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts worldwide have taken positive action in the fight against hunger."

Alexander Mueller, Assistant Director General, UN FAO

Facts and figures on MDG 7 and Climate Change globally

- Women and girls in rural areas in developing countries have the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security, and are negatively affected by drought, uncertain rainfall and deforestation.³ Because of their roles, unequal access to resources and limited mobility, women and girls in many contexts are disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as floods, fires, and mudslides. It is important to identify gender-sensitive strategies for responding to the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change.
- Education is fundamental to empowering women and girls, but, worldwide, 75 million children – including 41 million girls – do not attend school.⁴ A key reason why girls cannot attend school is that they are responsible for collecting water and firewood.⁵
- Two billion people in the world do not have access to energy sources. It is generally women who must collect firewood and other biomass products, and they spend from two to nine hours per day doing so. Close to 80 per cent of rural women in Asia, 60 per cent in Africa and 40 per cent in Latin America are affected by a shortage of firewood. Worldwide, pollution in homes caused by the smoke from burning firewood kills about two million women and children a year.⁶
- 884 million people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion people lack access to basic sanitation services, such as toilets or latrines.⁷

³ **52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Gender Perspective Issues on Climate change. 2010**

⁴ **MDG** monitor, www.mdgmonitor.org/goal2.cfm, accessed 20 February 2009.

⁵ UNDP. 2009. Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change.

⁶ UNDP. 2009. Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change.

⁷ United Nations Summit. September 2010. High Level Segment. MDG Goal 7: Fact Sheet

- Women have access to only 5 per cent of the concessions given worldwide to manage and use natural resources. Women invest almost all the money they receive for the use of biodiversity on improving their families' quality of life (90 per cent to 95 per cent).⁸
- An estimated 325 million people are seriously affected by climate change every year.⁹ Among them are many girls and women who are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change and natural disasters.
- Women in sub-Saharan Africa spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water, which is equivalent to a year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France.¹⁰
- The world has missed the 2010 target for biodiversity conservation. Based on current trends, the loss of species will continue throughout this century.¹¹

⁸ UNDP. 2009. Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change.

⁹ **The Anatomy of A Silent Crisis. Global Humanitarian Forum, Geneva 2009**

¹⁰ Lenton, Roberto, Albert M. Wright, and Kristen Lewis. 2005. Health, Dignity, and Development: *What Will it Take?* UN Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation. London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan

¹¹ United Nations Summit, September 2010.