

May 2018



This month we will be concentrating on the issue of plastics and recycling as well as advocacy.

Remember the three 'As' we used to work to: Awareness, Advocacy and Action? Although we now use the three Es of Education, Empowerment and Enablement, the three As are still a major part of our work as it is only by being aware of a problem we can advocate either for or against it and take appropriate action. This requires Education on a subject and our work should then Enable or Empower those affected.

Having recently returned from a study tour of our Federation Project in Meru, Kenya I have been inspired by the work that is going on in partnership with Child.org and CIFORD. Their work in educating women in agriculture and alternative rites of passage is inspirational. There is a full report on the tour in the SIGBI magazine.

Above the water taps in Kenya is a sign that says: 'Water is Life – do not waste it'. However, whilst travelling through the countryside, I was saddened to see the huge piles of plastic and litter in the otherwise beautiful countryside.

Kenya is an environmentally-aware country but as it costs to remove rubbish most of it stays where it is left, forming festering piles that children play in and animals eat. In turn the water supply becomes contaminated and infections abound.



There is so much in the media now about cleaning the oceans, reducing plastic and increasing recycling, it is something we all need to take action on. This requires advocacy so it is fitting that these two subjects are being covered.

**Barbara Dixon**  
Programme Director



### THE PLASTIC PLAGUE - RETHINKING PLASTIC

#### Naina Shah - APD Environmental Sustainability

*"The next five years may be the most important in the next ten thousand for our planet. There are plenty of reasons for hope, yet every day, doors of opportunity close. We know what to do. Now is the time to act."*  
Dr. Sylvia Earle

The effect that plastic is having on our world is difficult to fathom. It was recently estimated by the [World Economic Forum](#) and [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) that by 2050 there very well may be more plastic in our oceans than fish.

Plastic is one of the most widely-available, overused, inexpensive items in the world today. Humans have become so plastic-product dependent, adopting a one-use and throw lifestyle. This culture is the single lethal factor to creating plastic pollution.

Plastic is one product that doesn't go away, but the accumulation of these products has led to increasing amounts of plastic pollution around the world.

The composition of plastic is called polymers. Polymers often are made of carbon and hydrogen and sometimes oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur, chlorine, fluorine, phosphorous, or silicon. This composition of major toxic pollutants is potentially harmful to the environment in the form of air, water and land pollution.

Burning of plastic in the open air, leads to environmental pollution due to the release of poisonous chemicals. The polluted air, when inhaled by humans and animals, affects their health and can cause respiratory problems.



More than 300 million tons of plastic, half of this designed for single use, is produced annually and each year around 8 million tons of it ends up in the oceans.

The problem of plastic pollution is growing exponentially every year. Groundwater and reservoirs are susceptible to leaking environmental toxins from leaking plastics at waste dumps that ultimately enters the water supply.

#### Action - the time in now!

This is a catastrophe, what can we do? Can we be pragmatic about having a positive effect on our environment rather than stuffing it full of 'recyclables'?

1. By educating and engaging everyone in a conversation to rethink plastic. There is an urgent need to act in the way we deal with plastic waste. By challenging society's perception that this indestructible substance can be treated as 'disposable'. So, be the teacher, inculcating new perspectives about environment sustainability - develop new ideas to harness this silent killer - plastic.
2. Be mindful and take personal responsibility for the waste you create. 'Think Reusable – Not Disposable' by pledging to refuse single-use plastics.
3. Solutions lie in us through individual actions, legislative solutions and grassroots efforts. It requires a bottom-up and top-down approach. The act of buying a product made from recycled plastic materials is essential to close the plastic loop.

**This is a battle for everyone and everyone needs to be part of it. This is a long fight.**

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**ADVOCACY - WHERE TO START? Margaret Clark - APD Advocacy**

**What is Advocacy?**

In simple terms, Advocacy is being a voice for the voiceless. Part of our Programme Action as Soroptimists is to speak for those less fortunate than ourselves - for example the homeless, people involved in modern day slavery and communities with serious environmental concerns. As actors within Civil Society, we can often engage with people that government cannot reach.

**How do we Advocate?**

- First refer to the Soroptimist [ASKs](#), Soroptimist Statements and [Where We Stand](#) documents for information on the Soroptimist positions found on the Advocacy website.



- Conduct research on the subject you are advocating and get facts, figures, statistics if possible.
- Discuss, explore, promote and or lobby for the particular cause or issue in line with Soroptimist's position.
- Find interested and enthusiastic support; build relationships with influencers.
- Recognise International Days of Action.

**Individual Advocacy**

- Sign a petition on the SIGBI website [Petitions Page](#).
- Sign an email petition via email for example with [Change.org](#).
- Write a letter to your MP.

**Club Advocacy**

- Club Advocacy Groups motivate for a solution to a specific issue eg free school sanitary products; ratification of the [Istanbul Convention](#), environmental issues.
- Identify any existing advocacy groups in your area with the possibility of working together. This could include a cluster of Soroptimist Clubs.
- Contact the office of local politicians and legislators who are intimately familiar with your cause and inform them of your activities.
- Invite speakers to give informative and inspirational talks which will motivate members and increase awareness.

**Region and National Association Advocacy**

- Nominate a Regional/ National Association/Country Advocacy role to collectively work on advocacy projects strengthening, 'The Voice' to give greater impact.

**Your support – Our support**

Recording of activities on the [SIGBI database](#) is essential to retain our recently renewed ECOSOC Status. This evidences our activities and enables others to reference especially SI UN Representatives who speak as experts on our behalf. See [sigbi.org/advocacy](#) How we link our Club Projects from grass roots to United Nations See Advocacy tree [sigbi.org/advocacy](#)

**Civil Society Strategy: Have Your Say - GOV.UK**

Have your say on how government can work with and for Civil Society to tackle challenges and unlock opportunities to build a stronger society now and in the future. UK government is holding a consultation (**England only**) on working with Civil Society and views on how the government can work with and for Civil Society. This is an opportunity to have your say. Please take it; complete the survey by **9am on 22 May** - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/civil-society-strategy-have-your-say>



For further information, help and support on Advocacy, please contact me - my email address in on the left.

**Days of interest in May**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday** World Laughter Day    **23<sup>rd</sup>** End Obstetric Fistula    **SIGBI** Membership Month