

On World Book Day, IFUW urges all stakeholders to invest in education to end global illiteracy

Geneva, Switzerland, 23 April 2015 – On [World Book and Copyright Day](#), the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) highlights the stark reality that 781 million people worldwide today cannot read or write, almost two thirds of whom are women. IFUW, recognising that literacy is the cornerstone of personal autonomy, social inclusion and economic empowerment, strongly urges policy makers to immediately adopt and implement targeted local and national plans of action, as well as supplement and reinforce international political commitments for education in the post-2015 development agenda. IFUW further recommends the adoption of specific, relevant and measurable targets in all literacy campaigns in order to effectively monitor implementation and progress. Cognisant of modern-day technological advancements and necessities, IFUW calls for literacy to include financial and digital literacy, as well as functional competencies of reading, writing and numeracy. States should invest in the compilation, publication and dissemination of gender- and age-disaggregated data that evaluate literacy levels of all its population. Literacy should also be assessed along a continuum, as supported by [UNESCO](#).

President of IFUW, Catherine Bell, states: “There are 123 million 15-24 year old youths today – amongst them 76 million girls – who cannot pick up a book and comprehend the content and knowledge therein. They are deprived of the cardinal abilities of reading and writing, at their most basic interpretation. Books have the power to transform and enrich lives; to inspire, encourage and empower; to feed imagination, to ignite curiosity, to fuel ambition. Literacy is not just a gift or a privilege; it is fundamental life skill and an indispensable necessity that each citizen of the world should and *must* possess to truly be the masters of their own futures.”

Tackling illiteracy has been on the international agenda for decades. [Goal four](#) of the [Dakar Framework for Action](#)¹ calls for a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women. Nevertheless, progress overall has been slow and uneven, where in sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of illiteracy amongst adults has fallen by a nominal 3% in the last 15 years. Investment in quality, lifelong education must be prioritised and adequately funded by all governments in all regions, and access to paper and digital books must be provided in safe learning environments. National education policies should include programmes and initiatives to accelerate and support access to tailored learning for at-risk and marginalised groups, particularly for disabled, rural, indigenous, migrant and displaced women and girls.

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The International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW 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. IFUW is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO.

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¹ The Dakar Framework for Action *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments* (2000) outlines six education goals.