

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Presented by the Adult Resources Service
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WOSM: THE WORLD ORGANIZATION OF THE SCOUT MOVEMENT

At the time of writing, WOSM is composed of 151 National Scout Organizations. Most of them are National Scout Associations whereas others are Federations comprising several Associations.

WOSM therefore is the combination of all its members worldwide and should not be reduced to its international bodies such as the Committees, Bureau and Regional Offices. By virtue of his/her membership of a recognized National Association, every individual Scout around the world is a member of WOSM. Talking about WOSM, he or she should therefore say "we" not "they".

For that reason when discussing "equal opportunities" or "accessibility" we should be considering the situation in each National Association not just the reality of international bodies such as the World Scout Committee, Regional Committees or the World Scout Bureau as if "they" were the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

MALE AND FEMALE MEMBERS IN THE SCOUT MOVEMENT

On many occasions the subject has been raised over the years and particularly since the World Organization of the Scout Movement made it clear that it was open to both genders. Since 1977 the term "young people" has been substituted to "boys" and used consistently in WOSM's Constitution and thereafter in all publications, statements, etc... Indeed this was further confirmed by the adoption of three World Conference resolutions in 1993 and 1996.

The first one was adopted in Bangkok in July 1993. It was specifically on "coeducation" and had no concern with structures or whatever else. The resolution read:

The Conference

- *considering the importance of equal opportunities for girls and boys, women and men*

- *encourages National Scout Associations which offer their programmes to both boys and girls, young men and young women, to ensure that these programmes are designed specifically to reflect a truly coeducational process*
- *encourages these National Scout Associations to also ensure that adult leader training opportunities reflect the Association's coeducational purpose, process and programme*
- *asks the World Committee, through the World Programme Committee, to support National Associations in the above.*

The second resolution on the same issue was also adopted in Bangkok. It dealt specifically with adult leadership and was meant to complement both the above resolution and the World Adult Resources Policy adopted at the same World Scout Conference. This resolution read:

The Conference

- *considering the adoption by this Conference of the World Adult Resources Policy*
- *considering that WOSM is an organisation open to men and women, boys and girls*
- *considering the importance of equal opportunities for men and women*
- *requests the World Committee and those National Scout Organisations which have female members to ensure equal opportunities for both sexes as an important element in the implementation of the World Adult Resources Policy.*

A new emphasis was put on the same issue in July 1996 with the adoption by the Oslo Conference of another resolution "Females and males in WOSM" which read:

The Conference

- *considering Resolutions 6 and 8 of the 33rd World Scout Conference in Bangkok 1993*

- *appreciating the fact that many WOSM Member Organisations include females within their membership*
- *considering the need for a targeted programme aimed at the development of females, of males and - in those National Scout Associations which offer their programmes to both boys and girls, young men and young women - also of females and males together*
- *taking note of the different needs and experiences of females and males in the context of leader training*
- *recalling that few female members are represented in major decision-making bodies in WOSM*
- *recommends that the World Scout Committee ensures that in all its activities, especially in the context of youth programme and leader training, it meets the different needs of females and males and recommends to all National Scout Associations which have females in their membership to do the same*
- *strongly recommends to National Scout Associations and world bodies to work for a more equitable representation of females and males at all levels.*

So, in theory - or at least according to its Constitution and other legal texts - WOSM is open to all boys and girls without any kind of distinction or discrimination. In fact at present, a majority of National Organizations which are members of WOSM are open to boys and girls. This has now become the most frequent type of member organization within WOSM.

So, it would appear that the theory is confirmed by facts but, unfortunately this is not reflected in the actual leadership, at all levels of WOSM, be it its national member organizations or its international structure and although some progress may have been made,

(continue overleaf)

WOSM still appears at all levels as a male dominated organization.

Considering the issue of male and female membership one has to deal with two different realities. One is educational and requires a clarification of our concept of coeducation and how it should be disseminated throughout the organization. The other one is structural and relates to the fact that wherever an association is equally open to boys and girls this should be reflected in its adult leadership at all levels with equal opportunities being offered to both men and women, based on their competence for a position, not on any other consideration, such as gender. The same applies to other levels of WOSM on the international scene.

A Policy Statement on "Girls and boys, women and men within the Scout Movement"

Chaired by Jocelyne Gendrin, Vice Chairperson of the World Scout Committee and Chairperson of the Educational Methods Group, a task force met several times since the 34th World Scout Conference to draft a "policy statement" to be submitted to the 35th World Scout Conference in Durban by the World Scout Committee.

This draft has now been finalized, approved by the EM Group and endorsed by the World Scout Committee for submission to the World Scout Conference in Durban next July.

The proposed policy does not impose that all associations should be open to girls, particularly in cultures where separate education is the norm in all respects. However, in societies where mixed gender relationships (at school, in social and professional life) is the norm, Scouting has a role to play in helping boys and girls to cope with this situation and preparing them to take a constructive place in this environment. Clearly Scouting cannot stand on the fringe and refuse to play the game according to accepted societal rules. Indeed mixed gender situations were not the norm where and when Scouting was conceived - hence the creation of a "boys" movement - but in many other respects the Movement has always been innovative and forward looking. Many of its "educational peculiarities" have now been widely accepted and have become "the norm" in most educational institutions. Undoubtedly it would be

a pity for such an original and innovative Movement to lose its dynamism and to be seen as a remnant of the past, entrenched to defend a "boys only" approach, not to mention the obvious suspicion that such an attitude would generate - today - in many parts of the world.

Coeducation and a mixed environment

Putting boys and girls together is creating a mixed environment; it does not necessarily imply that a coeducational approach has been adopted. Mixity and coeducation are not the same and should not be confused.

Many associations have opened their membership to girls without reviewing or changing their programme in any way: they have created a mixed environment, they have introduced "mixity" but they have done nothing in terms of "coeducation". As the paper that will be submitted to the Durban Conference suggests:

"Coeducation is an approach in which the response to the educational needs of boys and girls, young men and young women, is conceived on the basis of a common educational proposal and a clearly defined set of objectives and method which aims at the development of both genders equally bearing in mind the specificity of each person."

Indeed the last concept in the above statement concerning "the specificity of each person" is a key element. It is a fact that if it is to produce any result, Scouting has to be adapted to each individual. This obviously includes "educational objectives" which, on a basis that is common to all, must be personalized, adapted by each individual member who will then be expected to do his or her best to achieve them. A coeducational setting will only require a particular adaptation of this basic rule since some of the "individuals" concerned will be males and others will be females. Indeed, in many cases there may be more differences between two persons of the same gender than between two persons of different genders.

Equal opportunities in the area of Adult Resources

On the basis of the "policy statement" on girls and boys, women and men within the Scout Movement, the World Adult Resources Committee agreed

that it would prepare "guidelines" concerning males and females in leadership positions within the Movement.

In the "policy statement" the section on "Adult Resources" clearly refers back to the World Adult Resources Policy which states, "In order to fulfil its Mission, each National Scout Association should have the adult leadership it needs to develop and function effectively".

In an association which is open to both genders, this requires:

- a distribution of roles and functions based on competencies, not gender
- the development of competencies to deal with both genders
- mutual respect and acceptance of differences among adult team members.

A number of associations that are open to boys and girls have opted for a dual system in which every position will be held jointly by a male and a female member. We do not feel that such a system, in the long run, will provide a suitable solution. We would see as an ideal solution, the natural balance of male and female leaders after a selection of the most competent person (male or female) for each position. This however may be an ideal view, a sort of utopia, something that will happen "spontaneously"... many years after the introduction of "coeducation" when the simultaneous membership of representatives of both genders will have become - and will be seen as - natural. In the meantime, each association or international body will have to find its own way of getting a balanced representation of both genders at all levels in their structure and, in some cases, a quota system - provided it is introduced on a provisional basis and as a step towards a more natural procedure - may be a suitable solution.

With all this in mind, the World Adult Resources Committee continues to work on "guidelines" which will also be submitted to the 35th World Scout Conference.

Any ideas or suggestions that our readers may have and will be prepared to share will be useful for the Committee to complete its task. Please send those to the Director of Adult Resources, World Scout Bureau, Box 241, 1211 Geneva 4, Switzerland before June 1, 1999.