

Leila Picco,

International SOROPTIMIST, *The STEM competences and the scientific subjects for Women's condition*

Leila Picco thanks for the invitation and explains that International SOROPTIMIS is a world women association constituted by women with a high qualification in their working environment. It operates through projects aimed at the promotion of human rights, the development in women's condition, the acceptance of diversity, equality and development. Each member represents a different professional category in order to favor a wide circulation of ideas among people with different working paths and different cultural backgrounds.

The word "Soroptimist" originates from two Latin words, "sorores" and "optimae": "sorores" means women linked by common objectives; "optimae" indicates women who have the competences and the strengths to reach them.

The Italian Soroptimist has 147 clubs widespread throughout Italy, with 5,500 members who are constantly increasing. They have an official status recognized by the most important UNO Agencies like the European Council, and in Italy one of the members is in the National Committee for Equality at the Ministry of Labor.

For the enhancement of women condition, which is their first aim, they have chosen some topics like the differences and violence of gender, the access and leadership obstacles in the world of work, but above all training. They have promoted awareness actions as well as tangible supporting projects. In this field, for the next two years, the Italian Soroptimist has drawn a Memorandum of Understanding with Unioncamere which gives two girls of each club the possibility to freely access the training courses of the local Chambers of Commerce. They have privileged the feminine entrepreneurship with seminars aimed at learning previously technical competences like computer science, business accounting, the use of web as a marketing system and so on. They are certain that the higher the level of competences is, the easier for a woman to enter the future job market, to acquire financial independence and to fight the gender differences. If the personal competence is appropriate for the world of work, even these aspects will become progressively less heavy.

Nowadays we are facing a period of economic crisis but history teaches us that the trend of economy is cyclic and sinusoidal. More or less strong crisis are followed by more or less intense phases of development sooner or later. It seems therefore important to help girls to be ready to face the future recovery with an appropriate preparation. The working possibilities in the future will increasingly be in the scientific and technological sectors.

With reference to the acquisition of competences in general, the Italian Soroptimist has drawn a three year protocol with the Italian Ministry of Education for the training of teachers of all school levels on topics like gender equality in its wider meaning and on violence against women.

Taking for granted that the STEMs are the subjects for the future, the problem is how to operate in order to address the girls towards them. The Soroptimist clubs are an important means for the dissemination of information, an incentive for action and a sentinel of the local priorities because they are deeply rooted in the territory where they perform incisive activities.

For the International Women's Day, on 8th March 2016, the Italian International Soroptimist has subscribed to the "Month of the STEM – the female students want to count!", promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Department. The project is dedicated in particular to students of any age as a contribution to contrast the gender stereotype

according to which girls are not particularly keen on scientific, technological, engineering and mathematical subjects, in a world in which all great themes, and consequently the new working environments, deal with what is studied in laboratories. Even though research and objective data are weakening this stereotype, it is still persisting for many reasons and the initiative promoted by the Ministry of Education invites everyone to reflect in depth on the issue. However, the last statistic surveys indicate that only a discomfoting 38% of female students direct their training and professional paths towards the scientific subjects.

Mainly using the competences and professionalities of their members, a lot of Soroptimist clubs have supported and proposed projects and paths aimed at raising awareness on the STEM themes. Three of these projects (Gela, Padua e Pavia clubs) have been published in the dedicated page of the Ministry of Education website so that they can be accessible and used by all schools.