CEDAW: The International Bill of Rights for Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women defines the right of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to protect this right. It establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination, and provides the basis for achieving equality between men and women through ensuring women’s equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life as well as education, health and employment.

Consider:

- A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past age 5
- When you invest in a woman, she invests 90% back into the health, nutrition and education of her family. Contrast with men who invest only 30-40% back into their families.
Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) recognizes the importance of education as the means by which to achieve women’s empowerment. The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG), to promote gender equality and empower women, specifically targets education as the means by which to eliminate gender disparity and ensure equal opportunities for women. It is the third MDG, but it is integral to achieved all other goals.

MWIA funds a variety of education initiatives in communities around the world. In the Darjeeling region of India, MWIA and the Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Centre are working to educate and empower the women of the tea-plantation communities to know, promote and enact their rights in four key areas: education, protection, nutrition and health. By giving women the tools they need to speak up and demand their rights from exploitative tea plantation employers and ineffectual local governments, the women of the region are able to ensure that their entire communities have access to government benefits, health services and education for their children.

In Kenya, MWIA is working with the Termination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Campaign to educate women, men and community leaders about the dangers of this harmful cultural practice, which the World Health Organization has called ‘a form of torture.’ An incredible aspect of this project is that it reaches out to adolescent girls, providing week-long empowerment camps. On these camps, girls are educated about their bodies, about FGM and about their rights; they are empowered to make their own decisions about their bodies, and to stand up for themselves.

MWIA and Loreto provide many opportunities for supporters to become involved in our works for development and justice. Learn more about MWIA’s work on the website www.loreto.org.au/Mary-Ward-International.aspx; apply to become a volunteer; make a donation; or simply spread the word this International Women’s Day!