



RIO+20 the future we want

Advocacy in Action

BY HILARY CLAUSON
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Our future is *now*, and Girl Guides everywhere want to make a difference in how it unfolds. Last June, at the Rio+20 United Nations (UN) Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, we did make a difference, by successfully lobbying for the inclusion of non-formal education as a means to achieve sustainable development worldwide.

As two of 25 participants in the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) delegation to Rio+20, we proudly represented our 10 million Girl Guide and Girl Scout sisters worldwide by advocating for *The Future We Want*. For many years, WAGGGS has been involved in UN processes, sending delegates to conferences and maintaining permanent representatives in six capitals, to ensure our Membership has a voice in the future of this planet.

The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development followed from the 1992 Earth Summit. We defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” We pushed it to the forefront of the international agenda, and convinced 190 nations to sign the resulting document, *The Future We Want*.

Building Consensus

In keeping with the UN’s focus on consensus-building, all 190 countries participating in the conference had to agree to a policy before it could be adopted. Agreement among all the countries – each having their own cultural, political and social backgrounds – is akin to a group of Pathfinders agreeing on what foods to pack or route to take on a wilderness trek. Compromises must be made, and things often get lost in the shuffle. Our role at Rio+20 was to bring our issues as representatives of an organization concerned with sustainable

Photo: courtesy Hilary Clauson



At my first Brownie camp, I saw no further than the hot chocolate and campfire songs at the end of an exciting day. The future seemed very far away. Today, I am taking part in molding that future.

Hilary Clauson

development to the table, and to ensure they were not left out of the discussion. One of our major concerns was non-formal education (curriculum-based learning outside of formal schooling).

Advocating for Non-Formal Education

The delivery of non-formal education is WAGGGS’ means to achieving sustainable development, and its inclusion in the Rio+20 outcome document would bring endorsement of and funding for such programs. It had previously been included in the overall document,



At my mother's insistence, I reluctantly joined Guiding as a Brownie. Twenty-three years later I can't think of anything other than Guiding that has shaped me more as a person or has been such a driving force in my life.

Darlene Sly McKechnie

but was subsequently removed during pre-negotiations at UN Headquarters. Therefore, a primary lobbying goal was to have this portion of the text reinserted.

By the final night of negotiations, and prior to the arrival of the Heads of State who would sign the outcome document, the education section had been nearly all agreed to, and the Chair of the Health and Education group was reluctant to introduce any changes. She would allow the inclusion of a new paragraph only if all negotiators could agree to it immediately. Unfortunately, the representative of the G-77 negotiating block (which, despite its name, actually represents more than 100 countries) could not agree without consulting all Members.

Lobbying

So began a frantic lobbying effort by us and other youth activists to convince G-77 Members to support a non-formal education paragraph. As the minutes ticked toward a midnight plenary for negotiators to communicate updates on their progress, we succeeded! At that plenary, the Chair of the Health and Education group announced that a new paragraph had been added to the education section:

We encourage Member States to promote sustainable development awareness among youth, inter alia (among other things) by promoting programs for non-formal education in accordance with the goals of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014.

In keeping with our Guiding tradition, we awarded "Citizenship" badges to the negotiators who had helped us to achieve the inclusion of this important paragraph. This gesture was warmly received by negotiators, who are more often criticized than applauded by activists.

From Brownies to Advocates

We both joined Guiding as Brownies, and never looked back. Today, as young Guiders in an organization that advocates for positive change, we are making a difference in the world. Our nations must uphold the international commitments found in UN agreements such as Rio+20's *The Future We Want*. WAGGGS Member Organizations must hold our nations to account and be a leading example for governments, corporations, and other organizations to ensure that future generations will live in a healthy natural environment, and future Brownies will continue to make their mark on sustaining this planet. 🌍

Hilary Clauson, a Brownie Guider in Ottawa, Ontario, is a new Member of the GGC Board of Directors. Darlene Sly McKechnie, of Milton, Ontario, is a Pathfinder Guider and was recently installed as Ontario International Adviser.