STI FORUM

Science, Technology & Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

Ninth Annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

Session 6: Advancing Sustainable Development with Women-centered Science and Technology solutions

(15:00-16:30 EDT, 10 May 2024; in-person, Trusteeship Council Chamber)

Background

The 9th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation includes a dedicated thematic session looking at the intersection of gender equality and STI solutions for sustainable development. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a fundamental human right and a foundation for a peaceful and prosperous world. Similarly, harnessing science, technology and innovation is crucial for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the world is currently not on track to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2030 and STI solutions are rarely designed with women's perspectives in mind.

Investment in STI solutions is seldom directed to address the challenges or opportunities faced by women and girls the world over. In addition, women and girls face significant barriers to education and employment in STI fields and, those who are working in STI face additional challenges. Women hold only one in three research positions worldwide and only one in five science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) jobs. Only 15% of tech startup founders are women[1], while around a third have at least one female founder. And women founder's share of venture capital has remained at 2 percent in the US, even lower in Europe. Although the share of women inventors has been increasing over the past 5 years, in 2023 only 17.7% of inventors named in international patent applications were women[2]. In addition, women inventors tend to be concentrated in biotech, food chemistry and pharmaceutical industries. They also tend to be more present in academia, rather than the private sector. On the other hand, 20 percent of funded African tech startups had a female founder in 2022[3].

The potential of STI is maximized when STI represents the range of diversity of people and perspectives. Representation is, however, often lacking. In 2019, it was noted that Black individuals made up just 2.5 percent of Google employees and 4 percent of those at Facebook and Microsoft (Crowell, 2023). The world is increasingly being shaped by the fast-developing technologies of machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Despite their great potential, left unregulated, these new technologies can widen existing inequalities. There are many risks (UN, 2023c). AI can reinforce biases against women and minority groups. Applications of AI, including in law enforcement and labor market and hiring, can discriminate by race or gender.

[1] https://startupgenome.com/articles/only-15-percent-of-tech-startup-founders-are-female
[2] According to WIPO data released in March 2024
[3] *https://disruptafrica.com/2023/02/20/*; *https://disruptafrica.gumroad.com/*

Despite these challenges, a number of companies, innovators, governments and other actors are developing and expanding practical women centered STI solutions for sustainable development. This session will showcase these solutions, unpack what makes them work and examine how to expand their benefit to more women and their communities.

Significantly scaling up resources for women-centered solutions requires stronger global partnerships and including women in decision making, in leadership positions and in the thinking and onset design of solutions. Strong alliances are also needed to change the gender-based norms and biases that withhold equal opportunities for women. This session will shed light on how to build these partnerships by sharing examples of what works.

In alignment with the CSW67 Agreed Conclusions[4], this session recognizes the urgent need to address the gender digital divide and prioritize digital equity. It discusses gender-responsive education and training, aiming to significantly enhance digital literacy among women and girls, thus equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate and innovate in the digital era. This session will also emphasize the essential role of fostering global partnerships and mobilizing financial investments to bridge the gender digital divide, highlighting the necessity of collaborative efforts and resource allocation to empower women and girls through science, technology, and innovation, thereby reinforcing the foundational pillars of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, this session touches upon the issue of protecting rights and promoting safe environments, including online activities.

The session will focus on solutions that address the five SDGs that will be reviewed by the High Level Political Forum in 2024: **Goal 1** - End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **Goal 2** - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **Goal 13** - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; **Goal 16** - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and **Goal 17** - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Objectives

This session aims to:

- Showcase women-centered tech and innovation solutions to advance sustainable development, guided by SDGs 1,2,13, 16 and 17.
- Point to actions for addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities to accelerate SDG implementation by harnessing women centered STI solutions.
- Identify concrete strategies to increase the participation of women in STI including in the design phase.
- Discuss how women-centered solutions that have been proven to be effective can be amplified to become part of the mainstream of STIs targeting sustainable development.

Format

The session will take the form of a panel discussion, with representatives from the private sector, civil society, academia and government. The moderator will briefly introduce the session, theme, speakers and

[4] https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023

context. The moderator will lead an interactive discussion with the panelists on their perspective of sustainable development, guided by the discussion questions below. This will be followed by interventions from discussants and high-level respondents.

Guiding questions

The following questions will guide the discussion – panel members will be encouraged to use specific, practical examples and lessons learned from real-world initiatives.

- *What are key challenges to and opportunities for integrating a gender perspective into STI policies to effectively address socio-economic development challenges?*
- *How can resources be directed toward research and innovation that address gender divides?*
- *How can STI initiatives also address interlinkages and intersectionalities of exclusion related to age, ability, ethnicity and others?*
- *What are some promising cases where a gender lens has been applied to connect women with innovative SDG solutions crafted with, by and for women?*

Supporting documents/publications

UN (2023). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The Gender Snapshot 2023 https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/gender-snapshot/2023/GenderSnapshot.pdf

UN (2023b). Commission on the Status of Women. Sixty Seventh session. Agreed Conclusions https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023

UN (2023c). Governing AI for Humanity. Interim Report of the Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_ai_advisory_body_governing_ai_for_humanity_interim_report.pdf

Crowell, R., (2023), Why AI's diversity crisis matters, and how to tackle it, Nature Career Feature, 19 May 2023, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-01689-4

Case studies (will be made available here: https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2024):

Asum, J., and Cimene, F., "Women and Food Security: A Southern Philippine Experience".

Pessina, M., *et al*., "Transforming Lives and Landscapes: The Innovative Journey of Fokus Frauen Switzerland and Casa de Maria in Northeast Brazil".

Science-policy briefs (will be made available here: https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2024):

Akinbi, J., "Addressing Disparities in Maternal Mortality: An Analysis of Pain Management Protocols and Their Impact on Global Maternal Health Equity".

Bakthavatchaalam, V., and Sa, M., "Empowering Female Participation in Engineering Research: Unmasking Constrains and Developing Gender-Sensitive Research Policies".

Kunitake, Y., and Bredikhina, L., "Discussions on the Legal Policies in the Metaverse: From the Perspective of Diversifying Self-Expression". *[peer-review pending]*

Moon, A., Oh, E., and Ji, S., "Empowering Female STEM Talent for STI: Policy Implementation and Implications".