Summary of CSW65 Side Event: Gender Equality in STI

A side event on Gender Equality in Science, Technology, and Innovation: Towards an Inclusive STI Ecosystem hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United Nations, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) was held on 15 March on the margins of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) to discuss the challenges associated with the participation of women into STI fields, and reflect on actions in support of inclusive workplaces and ecosystems to retain and support women in their STI career advancement.

Speakers highlighted the importance of encouraging girls to participate in STEM and ensuring girls' equal access to STEM education at an early age to build the pipeline. Speakers noted the need for improvement in the courses in STI fields and the teaching of these courses as STI related courses are often uninspiring and not inclusive of women. Ms. Shirley Malcolm specifically mentioned that micro-aggressions within the classroom against women are tolerated, discouraging women who initially show interest in the field of STI to continue pursuing STI related courses. Female faculty members in STI fields is still lacking and the female faculty members that do exist, aren't being promoted to leadership roles in educational institutions. The audience stressed the importance of women in leadership roles and female role models in STI in their participation during the event as well. Speakers determined that harassment towards women is a problem in STEM fields, but observed that solving this issue isn't possible without engaging the rest of the ecosystem. Thus, speakers underscored the need to change the culture of institutions and the culture of STI fields to support women in order to retain female talent. Ms. Gloria Bonder further emphasized this point as she assessed gender-centered intervention is needed not only in STI, but across all other sectors as well in order to create meaningful change. Investment in schemes promoting female representation in STI fields was proposed as a solution to making the ecosystem more inclusive of women. The audience echoed the panelist's prioritization of addressing social and cultural restrictions hampering women's advancement, as well as the structural changes to be made. Speakers also highlighted the significant gender divides in terms of access to technology, digital services and digital skills. Ms. Yu Ping Chan noted that basic barriers for access to technology for women are significant, particularly in developing countries. The importance of gender disaggregated data and tracking results was stressed in measuring the effects of policies which aim to increase the participation of women in STI fields. Ms. Subama Mapou prioritized this point for indigenous peoples in New Caledonia by noting that evidence based, data driven solutions are crucial in engaging indigenous women in a respectful manner and in ensuring that the indigenous community can grow and thrive in fields of STI. Engaging men and boys as partners and allies in these efforts was flagged as another key success factor.

There are some promising trends and initiatives around the world that are working to attract and retain more girls and women in STI fields and speakers shared efforts that are bearing fruit. For example, Ms. Marielle Yasmine Agbahoungbatan shared how Sèmè City, an eco-city in Benin, aims to promote education and youth empowerment through the establishment of an international city of knowledge and innovation which will attract talent as well as create more than 100,000 jobs, at least a third of which will be self-employment and 40% by women by 2030. She noted that

under female management, Sèmè City has implemented several initiatives to increase female participation in STI, such as the robotics camp project which aims to introduce the knowledge of robotics science for girls in secondary schools. With the establishment of a new flourishing national program for gender equality in STI (2020), Argentina has also made progress in engaging more women in STEM fields. In Argentina, 66% of graduates in higher education specializing in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics are women. In addition, the creation of several Women networks in STI at the national and regional level in Argentina have contributed to retaining female talent in STI fields. Ms. Subama Mapou mentioned that the creation of new enabling networks in New Caledonia also proved to be successful in increasing indigenous female engagement in STI. Another example of efforts made to create a more inclusive ecosystem for women in STI is Bulgaria's commitment to promoting women's leadership in professional roles in the tech industry as well as showing the face of the new generation of female entrepreneurs in the digital economy. Bulgaria ranks second in the European Union on the participation of women in management positions, nearly 50% in Bulgaria compared to the European Union's average of 37%. Bulgaria continues to lead in terms of the number of women and girls studying ICT specialties as they rank third in the European Union. Ms. Fatima Barkan from Morocco's Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family noted that Morocco has been making strides in the empowerment of women in STI through the implementation of a national digital strategy. Through this strategy, a digital development agency was established, with its mission being to disseminate digital tools and promote citizens' use of these tools, thereby equipping Moroccan female entrepreneurs with the tools needed to succeed in the digital economy. National initiatives implemented to improve access to technology for women in Morocco have been showing promising results, such as the proportion of women having access to a computer is currently 80% and access to a smartphone is 72%. Looking forward, we must acknowledge that achieving gender equality is a common obligation and understand that women's contribution to the world's scientific progress is essential in dealing with the complexity of global challenges.

ITU, WIPO and UNESCO representatives shared recent trends and actions led by their respective Organizations. Below are links to resources in support of their interventions

- WIPO: Tracking women's participation in international patent applications filed under the WIPO Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) System - Gender Equality and Intellectual Property (wipo.int).

- ITU: ITU hosts the secretariat for the EQUALS Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age – www.equals.org, and promoted International Girls in ICT Day (www.itu.it/girlsinict) – which this year marks its 10th anniversary on April 22.

- UNESCO:
    - The UNESCO Science Report's chapter on gender in science available at https://en.unesco.org/commemorations/womenandgirlinscienceday#usr
    - UNESCO STEM and Gender Advancement (SAGA) project for STI related policies and sex-disaggregated data STI gender-related policies and sex disaggregated data available: https://en.unesco.org/saga.