

Summary of Gender Equality in Science, Technology, and Innovation: Towards an Inclusive STI Ecosystem and Connectivity for All

The panel on Gender Equality in Science, Technology and Innovation: Towards an Inclusive STI Ecosystem and Connectivity for All hosted by The Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations, the Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations, the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Food Programme on 5 May marked the Sixth Annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals by reflecting on the challenges to be addressed with the leaky pipeline of women into STI fields, but also the actions to be taken to create more inclusive workplaces and ecosystems to retain and support women in their STI career advancement.

There was wide consensus among the speakers from government, UN agencies and civil society on the actions needed to make sustained progress. Speakers highlighted the importance of female mentorship in retaining and empowering women in STI to reach leadership positions as many young women leave the industry in the early stages of their career. Ms. Funmilola Ikeolu Fagbola, Founder of the Rural Girls in Technology (RuGiT) and 2019 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Young Talent Sub-Saharan Africa, further emphasized this point by noting that in Africa, although notable numbers of young women enter STI fields, only 32% of the female population are involved STI due to issues of retainment of women in STI. Speakers also highlighted the significant gender divides in terms of access to technology, digital services and digital skills. Calls were made to place women's digital inclusion at the center of economic reactivation post Covid-19 pandemic. Ms. Mónica Zalaquett, Minister of Women's Affairs and Gender Equity of Chile and Chair of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, emphasized the importance of strengthening multi-stakeholder coordination, highlighting the role of governments in mainstreaming the gender perspective in STI policies, as well as the participation of academia, civil society, the private sector, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other intergovernmental organizations in promoting collective action in this area. Panelists underscored the importance of addressing social and cultural restrictions hampering women's advancement, as well as the structural changes to be made. Dr. Maysoun Ibrahim, Board Member and Chairperson of the Innovation Supporter Network (ISN) at the Higher Council for Innovation and Excellence, stressed the need to conduct research on women in STI as there is an absence of woman focused studies to understand the complex social, cultural and ethical mechanisms that impact them in STI Fields. Another dimension flagged was the need to overcome stereotypes and combat myths and outdated norms about associations between girls and women and STEM. Mrs. Baraah Alsaïd Ramadan, a graduate from the World Food Programme's EMPACT 2020, noted female stereotypes about women needing to choose between family life or a career must be overcome, and that all women should have the ability to pursue a career and raise a family, equally. Understanding that STI is crosscutting was flagged as another key factor in creating effective solutions to combat gender inequality. Mr. Jean-Martin Bauer, Senior Advisor at the World Food Programme, stated that if there are issues in other areas

such as peace and security, we won't be able to fully achieve gender equality in STI either, so we need to be mindful of the bigger picture when addressing gender inequality in STI.

There are some promising trends and initiatives around the world that are working to attract and retain more girls and women in STEM fields and speakers shared efforts that are bearing fruit. For example, H.E. Ambassador Francisco António Duarte Lopes, Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations, noted Portugal's commitment to increase female participation in STI. Portugal, in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Science International Trust and other stakeholders, organizes an commemorative event annually to celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. This event provides great opportunity to take stock of progress made so far and for broad debate on available resources and best approaches to achieving gender equality. Mr. Rene Ruidiaz, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations mentioned Chile's efforts in this space as well. Chile has continuously engaged with Finland, Microsoft, Tunisia and other partners in the Technology and Innovation Coalition of the Generation Equality Forum in order to mainstream gender across Covid-19 pandemic recovery efforts. Minister Zalaquett also noted a regional alliance that Chile is proposing with the support of Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay, Costa Rica and others in the region, which will be focused on initiatives such as creating a virtual regional platform that serves as a networking space for women in STI and will share and make available training courses and materials on digital competence for women To address issues of retainment of women in STI, Ms. Cassie Lee, Co-Founder of the Brooke Owens Foundation, highlighted the Brooke Owens Fellowship program, which features paid internships and executive mentorship for exceptional undergraduate women and gender-minority students in aerospace. This program includes applicants from all over the world and provides networking opportunities for young women to further their careers in STI. Looking forward, we must acknowledge that the incorporation of more women in STI is indispensable to bolster the construction of a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable post-COVID future.