

## **Initiatives for reducing the Gender Gap in Africa**

Friday 8 November 11:30, Co-chairs: Marie-Francoise Ouedraogo and Igle Gledhill

The discussion was kicked off by questions on three slides, one from each of the project tasks.

### **1. 27% of the female respondents in Africa disagreed with the statement that their employer treated everyone fairly, and so did 25% men<sup>1</sup>. What initiatives can change this?**

Here are some exchanges about fairness: the countries in Africa are diverse. “We refuse to be treated unfairly - we protest!”. “But in our country, we can’t protest.” There isn’t a uniform understanding of unfairness. It has more components than gender. In many countries, unfairness is less explicit and more implicit. Many men are also treated unfairly.

Concerning the survey, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the numbers of scientists are low in Africa, and languages and religions are so diverse – we can’t draw many definite conclusions on the evidence we have so far. Why was the number of survey respondents low in Africa? Several possibilities were advanced: people started the long survey but did not realise they could save and complete it. Access to computers, online facilities and privacy was a factor. People may be reluctant to fill out a survey at all. Was the title of the survey a factor? The word “gender” is associated with benefits for women, so it could be possible.

We are not comfortable with the way evaluation and remuneration are done in our countries. When the same rules are used for men and women, it may be harder to women to satisfy the same condition. One point of view is that It is harder for women to reach specified numbers of publications or conferences attended, so replace these with other conditions. From another viewpoint, leave the criteria the same but provide funding specifically for women, so that the proportion of women in top positions can rise, more students can work with female supervisors, and more women can publish.

In some countries, the big challenges are over for the pioneers, and now it is time to grow and create space for other women. Provide a structural advantage to women where the system is geared against women progressing. For example, men and women who start at the same time do not progress together when pregnancy interrupts progress (PhD supervision was threatened in a cited case). On return, should there not be a year of research to catch up?

### **2. How can African authors best be encouraged?**

Many Africans move out of developing countries because of the poor conditions for research at home, and therefore they publish with affiliations outside Africa, and their papers are not attributed to the African region. In an ideal world, authors should not have to think about whether journal editors consider gender or level of development. However, a contrast has sometimes been observed between publishing with a famous supervisor (3 months to publication) and publishing alone from Africa (long times and refusals). In Africa, it is well known that is difficult to be able to afford to publish in high impact journals, but there are different practices in different disciplines. Outside mathematics, high publication costs mean that papers are sent to lower impact, lower cost journals but review times may be very long indeed. Free help with English and scientific writing is needed where universities do not employ English language editors. Why are we not as productive as we should be with the intellectual capacity that we have? We are still overcoming the barriers of going to look for internet access, going to other countries for a PhD, and coping with an environment that

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<sup>1</sup> Noting that the gender gap was statistically insignificant.

is not conducive to research. A longing was expressed for working in serene, neat, stimulating environments where internet access is provided.

### **3. What are the most successful initiatives to support in the regions of Africa?**

- For girls: awards and prizes for girls in science and innovation, including those awarded by scientific societies; PhD students and women from universities who make the future different for today's girls; making it possible for girls to enter competitions, even if they don't have an email account, or a computer; training girls how to create an email and save their work on a computer.
- For education: in many African countries most primary school teachers are women without high qualifications; provide them with capacity building opportunities and access to science culture.
- For women making change: sustainable workshops, meeting African researchers to talk; Women in Science Without Borders; OWSD.
- For departments and institutions: portraits of women in science on the walls, especially local women, because every country has its own cultures; campaigns for Women in Science Day on 11 February.
- For conference organisers: inviting and involving women in all capacities.

There was consensus that evaluation of initiatives is needed, because without evaluation we can't progress as well. The conversation ended with a determination to exchange information via a google docs site, to be investigated through Women in Science Without Borders.