

WHY WE NEED AN INTERNATIONAL DAY?

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The phenomenal pace of technological advances sweeping across the world is in serious need of sufficient numbers of scientists and engineers, science and technology educators, health professionals, economists, political scientists and policy experts, i.e., scientists in all sectors. These sectors also include law and library science.

The important objectives of the universal mandate of Agenda 2030 in correcting and eventually reversing negative trends in development globally and in sustaining a productive life and quality of life, in all countries, will not be achieved unless women are given ample opportunities to enter and to excel in science, technology and the above-mentioned professions.

Girls need to see women role models in order to find the encouragement to enter into courses of study that will enable them to become scientists. Girls aspiring to become professionals in the scientific arena are in especial need of encouragement, nurturing, and a gender-sensitive and inclusive environment. And all of us should be exploring how the entertainment and fashion industry also can use a science-based theme to set an example.

Science should also be a focus of youth-oriented participation at the United Nations, and the application of science in the world's largest industry, tourism, should also be developed.

Women who are scientists have for too long been neglected for their work and not even have received recognition for their achievements.

Often, women who are scientists are faced with a choice between following their chosen career and in having a family. The choice is not an easy one. While women constitute half of humanity, even in developed countries that have ready access to higher education, the number of women in the

sciences is not equal to that of their male counterparts.

Talented and capable women thus find obstacles to entering these fields, and even when women do enter these fields, women do not reach the pinnacle of their profession, whether in companies or in universities.

It therefore is up to enlightened leadership in the academy to promote women in all areas of science.

There is concern internationally in the academic arena about this gender gap, both for practical reasons and for the egregious moral implications that unequal pay for equal work manifests.

Science is essential to the development and prosperity of all of humanity. When science lacks a robust and vivacious input that would result from the inclusion of the widest range of talent, viewpoints and work methods will produce a society that is lacking a heart.

With the 2030 Agenda now adopted and awaiting the Statistical Commission in March 2016 to present the indicators that will spell success or failure in the national context, national capacities will always differ when support for women who enter science is sought. An International Day encourages those women already in science and encourages girls to follow suit.

Highlighting the full range of talents, perspectives, experiences, and skills of women scientists and engineers should help to advance the science itself and act as a conduit to inspire grassroots women to become "citizen scientists" as well.

The low representation of women in science is an obstacle to global capacity building for sustainable

development. Thus, awareness-raising is a critical factor, and this is where the International Day will seek an ever-growing audience who implement the ideas of parity and equality not just on 11 February but on all days of the year.

There is only one woman who is a Chief Scientist in the entire UN system of programmes and agencies, Jacqueline Mc Glade of the UN Environment Programme. More specialized agencies need to take this successful model that UNEP is implementing, and the ever-dynamic Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, must be congratulated for his vision in this appointment.

Agenda 2030 contains a number of paragraphs that deal with gender equality and achievement of all the SDGs (14 and 20), and targets are also science-based (3.3), just for a few such instances.

The three parts of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism will be based on a multi-stakeholder collaboration among Member States, civil society, the private sector, the science community and UN entities, and will be composed of an UN Inter-Agency Task Team on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs, a collaborative multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs and an online platform (para. 70, Agenda 2030).

ECOSOC would also do well to consider some type of science-related session, with the idea of global citizens who are also scientists worthy of exploration.

The International Day for Women and Girls in Science, commemorated annually on 11 February during the annual session of the UN Commission on Social Development, will add prestige to the scientific achievements within the UN system, in national contexts, in universities and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

Women's talents, perspectives, work methods and skills will be recognized worldwide on such a day for wide impact. Promotion of education for women in science and for their entry into scientific careers will also serve to build inclusive institutional climates within all countries, given the universal nature of the 2030 Development Agenda, and allow policies and procedures to be crafted for gender equality and parity, leadership training, and mentoring.

When the Committee on Development Policy meets in October 2016 to finalize work on the

Comprehensive Policy Review for Development (QCPR), it would also do well to ensure that policy reflects the need for science, and women in science, to be center-stage.

Commemoration of the Day will also assist in:

1. The cultural transformation from the relegation of women to a satellite role and to a lesser role than their male counterparts. An inclusive and collegial climate that encourages women to add their talents to implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda;
2. Encouraging women to advance into senior research positions and to be appointed and elected to leadership positions within industry and academia;
3. Engaging annually with women who are scientists will widen a broader public knowledge of the role of women in science will help publicize jobs, especially for youth and girls as they mature, in high-tech sectors that need to be filled, jobs that are traditionally male-oriented;
4. The full potential of every person being realized when science belongs to all citizens, male or female, rich or poor, people in the North or the South;
5. Ensuring the sustainability of development for women to achieve equality and full participation in science and in decision-making will ensure that there be equal pay for scientific work by men and women.

We must recall the vision of Minerva Bernardino of the Dominican Republic, one of the great figures in the history of the United Nations, who included in the Charter of the UN the phrase "the equal rights of men and women."

Her vision has filtered through the concept of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, and we honor her memory on the first commemoration of this historic UN Observance.