**Speaking Points for the “Women in STEM in Time of the Pandemic – Facing Challenges, Finding Resilience.” Virtual conference.**

**8 March (Mon), 2021, – 12:00 – 12:50 PM CET**

1. It is International Women’s Day today. UNITAR along with the International Federation of Engineering Education Societies (IFES) and the Global Engineering Deans Council (GEDC) and the Secretary general Dr Hans Hoyer, are very pleased to contribute to this special day. We are committed to the empowerment of women and girls especially the issue of women in STEM.
2. Thank you to all the distinguished panellists and speakers
3. Agenda 2030 was agreed to over five years ago. Its implementation has fired the imagination of millions globally. Across all its goals and targets, the power of science is everywhere. The empowerment of women and girls through higher participation in science is crucial to reaching the world we want by 2030. However, if the benefits of modern science and technology breakthroughs are to be reaped, then we must ensure all hands are on deck. The human capacity gap has to be addressed. This gap will not go away without the fuller engagement of women in science and STEM. Specially for recovering and building a post COVID world.
4. Sustaining economic growth (SDG8) and achieving higher productivity through technological upgrading and innovation implies that we need more women in STEM. The figures are very clear: Mckinsey Global Institute (2015) has found that if women were to participate in the economy equally to men (full-potential scenario), it would add an extra 28 trillion USD (26%) to annual global GDP in 2025 in comparison to the business as usual scenario.
5. Unfortunately, we are facing a backward slide in the number of women filling science-based roles. Girls are less likely to consider a career in computer science, physics or engineering now than 100 years ago.
6. In OECD countries, only 14% of young women entering higher education recently chose science related fields of study, compared with 39% of young men.
7. Whilst getting women into STEM fields is important, keeping them in these fields is arguably even more crucial. Many women drop-out of these careers, a Harvard Business Review research on the US “brain drain” in STEM recently showed that 52% of women in quit their jobs, mostly at key moment in their lives—in their mid to late thirties. Based on today’s data, the research finds that if we could cut female attrition by 25%, we would add 220,000 highly qualified workers to the US labour market alone.
8. The reasons for the drop-out rate are multiple and complex, but some exits surveys highlight “masculine” work cultures or rhythms, or lack of gender sensitivity in the work place, including with respect to parental leave or work-life balance policies, gender bias in promotion scales or simply stereotypical gendered attitudes. The cumulative effect of which forms the so-called “glass ceiling”.
9. Combatting gender stereotypes is essential to overcoming gender inequalities in science and STEM fields, this includes the way our children are educated and gender bias in the classroom, for example assuming that boys are naturally better at maths and physics whilst girls are more suited to social sciences.
10. Gender equality is a topic close to my heart and UNITAR had been actively participating in the promotion of gender equality and parity programmes both externally and internally within its own staff body. In 2015 I joined the International Gender Champions Network in Geneva, pledging in my personal and professional capacities to strive towards gender parity and the dissolution of gender barriers.
11. In 2015, UNITAR also launched its Women’s Leadership Programme, promoting the participation of women in political leadership positions worldwide. Noticing the gender gap that exists in Parliaments, Governments and on UN delegations including to the UN Security Council and General Assembly, two of the world’s most important global decision-making bodies, UNITAR’s Women’s Leadership Programme is working across the UN System to promote the participation of women in decision making fora, and is working also with the UN Women SWAP team to strengthen the role of women at the highest echelons of the UN staff corps.
12. I strongly believe that gender parity will only be achieved if we act together, on multiple fronts, through multiple channels, with multiple tools and with multiple means. Building awareness about gender equality and women’s empowerment principles, and their relationship to human development, is essential.
13. UNITAR is committed to working with member countries in attaining the SGDs, in particular Goal 5 - gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. We are also mindful that the STEM fields are among those industries which need to focus better on the inclusion and participation of women.
14. UNITAR organized diverse training programmes including training on women’s empowerment and gender equality, training using satellite images to promote evidence-based decision-making, women digital upskilling and reskilling.
15. In addition to that, female participants with different STEM backgrounds who have participated in different training programmes have produced diverse STEM related projects and social enterprises aiming to solve local challenges in their communities and advance their countries progress towards the SDGs including women’s empowerment and gender equality.
16. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone around the world, including women in STEM. Numerous reports have said that stipulated that the little advances that have been made to include women workers in STEM have been rolled back by the pandemic . The pandemic has also disproportionately affected women and other minority groups who work in research . Long-standing barriers to equality in the fields of STEM and education are being vividly exposed by the on-going pandemic.
17. Nevertheless, women are taking lead roles in pandemic response, serving as frontline medical healthcare workers and researchers . UN Women estimates that up to 70% of health and social care workers are women, which puts them in a precarious position right in the center of global pandemic response. Women researchers are also at the forefront of vaccine development, therapeutics, and even tech that helps governments and institutions keep track of how the virus is spreading.
18. Today’s conference seeks to amplify the voices of women working in the various STEM industries from all over the world. We want to explore how the pandemic has affected issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women who work in medicine, technology, research, and other related fields. We want to learn from each other about the challenges that the pandemic has brought about and further our understanding of the opportunities that our precarious situation may offer.
19. Thank you