

International Panel on Women in STEM Concludes with Recommendations for Addressing Gender Disparities

Recommendations for a holistic approach consistent across different societal segments and life stages

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- In recognition of International Women's Day on March 8th, the webinar titled "Women in STEM – An International Comparison on Current Challenges and Opportunities", organized by the Office of Global Communications at the Prime Minister's Office of Japan, took place on

Wednesday March 1, 2023. It concluded with the recommendation that a holistic approach needs to be taken to make not only systemic changes but also cultural and societal changes involving families, social media, and all levels of education systems and the labor market via initiatives that are consistent across all these different segments of society and across different stages of people's lives to address the global challenge of gender disparities in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

The full video of the webinar can be accessed via the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHwSzgCuXc8>

Increasing the participation of women in STEM is a global challenge. The Government of Japan also understands its importance and raised this issue as a key topic at the World Assembly for Women (WAW!) – an annual international conference aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment held in Tokyo in December 2022. This webinar was organized to further enhance the discussion held at the WAW! Conference at the beginning of Japan's G7 presidency this year.

This online event gathered attendees from a variety of countries and sectors including business, academia, NGOs, educational institutions, and students.



Ms. Yumiko Murakami, General Partner at MPower Partners, moderated this webinar and welcomed international experts in STEM as follows:

- Dr. Rie Kijima, Co-founder of SKY Labo/Assistant Professor and Director of Initiative for Education Policy and Innovation at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto
- Dr. Nergis Mavalvala, Dean of MIT School of Science/Curtis (1963) and Kathleen Marble Professor of Astrophysics
- Ms. Debora Comini, Director of UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific.

Following opening remarks by Ms. Keiko Okada, Director-General of Gender Equality Bureau of Japan, the panelists shared the current state of the two pre-defined issues of 1) the low proportion of women who study STEM and 2) the low participation of women in the STEM labor market as well as the possible causes of the underrepresentation of women in STEM.

The main possible causes of underrepresentation of women in STEM regardless of country shared a common theme related to “changing mindsets”. Whether these mindsets are comprised of non-cognitive internal factors such as low self-efficacy (feeling that one can succeed), low self-concept (perception of yourself compared to others) and low motivation of girls and women themselves, or those of external stakeholders like the impact of systemic biases and discrimination; “changing mindsets” seemed to be a major factor in solving this challenge. There were also some causes of underrepresentation that were unique to underdeveloped countries - poor learning foundations for both girls and boys due to difficulties in receiving an education, for example.

Individual presentations by the speakers were followed by a panel discussion discussing best practices as well as recommendations to tackle this challenge.

- Dr. Kijima highlighted near-peer mentors, female STEM role models, creating safe learning environments and fostering an environment that encourages risk-taking as important factors in addressing the aforementioned causes. As recommendations, she mentioned programs that work like a revolving door, where anyone can come in and experience some aspects of STEM and emphasized the importance of implementing policies that incentivize different institutions to promote gender equality.
- Dean Mavalvala cited the “Maria Klawe Experiment,” which quadrupled the number of female computer science majors at Harvey Mudd College by rebranding, visualizing success and “making it matter” (by connecting efforts to social impact, for example) as a best practice. Her recommendations included ensuring committed leadership at all levels, not only by providing incentives but also by leveraging resources and presenting the economic arguments of the benefits of increased participation of women.
- Ms. Comini introduced UNICEF’s “Skills4Girls” programme, which supports adolescent girls and motivates them to learn STEM and then increase their participation in skilled work. She recommended working from both an economic angle, with solid up-to-date data, as well as a political angle, working with policy makers to explicitly embed gender equality and access to education including STEM in national development plans, to address this challenge.

The panelists then engaged with the participants in a lively Q&A session, and the webinar concluded with the aforementioned recommendations.

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