AAAS champions women in science at international events

Diverse participation maximizes benefits of innovation, speakers say

By Michaela Jarvis

Speakers at two international conferences supported by AAAS stressed the importance of increased female representation and leadership in scientific fields to take maximum advantage of available talent and optimize solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing the planet, such as climate change, food security, and poverty.

If more women are not included in STEM leadership, “We lose talent, we lose perspective, and we invent solutions for a few when we should be inventing solutions for all,” said Julia MacKenzie, AAAS director of international relations, at the World Science Forum (WSF), held 7–10 November in Jordan.

The WSF, begun in 2003 by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, along with AAAS, UNESCO, and the International Council for Science, drew nearly 3000 participants from 140 countries to its 4-day biennial gathering and presented a huge array of issues with a theme of Science for Peace. At the opening ceremony, AAAS Chief Executive Officer Rush Holt stressed the necessity of both international collaboration and local involvement among scientists.

“For the scientific enterprise to contribute to peace and sustainable development, we must ensure that scientists and ideas can move freely across the globe so science can thrive for the benefit of all people,” said Holt, who is also the executive publisher of the Science family of journals. “Simultaneously, we must ensure that scientists are working in and for their local communities.”

Adding the issue of gender equity while invoking the WSF theme, Katalin Boglay, Hungarian representative to the United Nations, touched on how “diversity among innovators helps guarantee that the products and services created contribute to sustainable peace and prosperity.”

The WSF offered five sessions devoted specifically to the issue of women’s participation and leadership in science and engineering throughout the world, and it included a call for new policies and further study to “positively affect gender equality in STEM” in its 2017 declaration. At a conference focused exclusively on women that took place in Kuwait just 2 weeks before, Women Leaders in Science, Technology, and Engineering +10 (WLSTE+10), accomplished women from all over the world came together to serve as role models and inspiration for the next generation of women in science.

WLSTE+10 was held 23–25 October under the patronage of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in collaboration with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, AAAS, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the U.S. State Department, and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

At a plenary session at WLSTE+10, AAAS Chief Operating Officer Celeste Rohlfing cited the names of the women in three top leadership positions at AAAS—Chair of the AAAS Board Barbara Schaal, President Susan Hockfield, and President-Elect Margaret Hamburg. Rohlfing said that it is AAAS’s mission to advance science and engineering “throughout the world to the benefit of all people.”

“We are only able to do that,” Rohlfing said, if a diverse group of scientists and engineers—“not just men, not just...
In October 2017, the Council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) elected 396 members as Fellows of AAAS. These individuals will be recognized for their contributions to science and technology at the Fellows Forum to be held on 17 February 2018 during the AAAS Annual Meeting in Austin, Texas. Presented by section affiliation, they are:

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