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UNESCO BANGKOK MEDIA ADVISORY


Panel discussion with successful women in STEM and networking reception to highlight release of a regional study on gender barriers in education and the workforce, held to coincide with International Women’s Day 2015

BANGKOK, 25 FEBRUARY, 2014 – When it comes to high-level careers in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields in Asia, women are too often left out of the equation. Stereotypes foisted upon girls in childhood about what constitutes “appropriate” interests lead to anxiety and lowered expectations in later schooling, ultimately limiting career choices.

A Complex Formula: Girls and Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Asia, is the first study in the region to examine this cycle in depth, assessing the extent of female participation at all levels in STEM fields, analyzing prominent gender disparities and offering educational and policy solutions to address them. UNESCO Bangkok will launch "A Complex Formula" at a special event held on 9 March, the day after International Women’s Day.


WHEN: 9 March 17:30 – 21:00. Tentative programme:
Registration: 17:30-18:00
Opening ceremony: 18:00-18:15
Video screening: 18:15-18:30
Panel discussion: 18:30-19:30
Star gazing: 19:30-20:00
Networking reception: 20:00-21:00

WHERE: Science Centre for Education Exhibition Hall and Planetarium, 928 Sukhumvit Road (Near Ekkamai BTS Station)

WHO: UNESCO Bangkok Director Gwang-Jo Kim and Science Center Director Suranan Supawankit will open the launch ceremony, followed by a video screening of the key messages of the report, and a panel discussion featuring prominent women in STEM from Asia sharing their stories and discussing the challenges in the region. Panelists include Jingmei Li, 2014 winner of the UNESCO-L’Oréal Women in Science International Fellowship and post-doctoral researcher in human genetics at the Genome Institute of Singapore; Pornthip Kongchun, former head of marketing at Google Thailand; and Deanne Renting, an Australian Senior Production Engineer at Chevron Thailand Exploration and Production, who, as a new mother, will offer a unique perspective on balancing her work in STEM in Asia with family life. A video message from Naoko Yamazaki, the second
Japanese woman in space, will also be featured. A networking reception will follow the panel discussion.

CONTACT: For further information on the report and to RSVP for the launch, please contact: Aliénor Salmon, Research Assistant at UNESCO’s Education Policy and Reform Unit, a.salmon@unesco.org. (NOTE: Those interested in attending are asked to RSVP by Monday 2 March, as spaces are limited.)

BACKGROUND: Key findings from 'A Complex Formula':

"A Complex Formula" helps fill the gap left by the dearth of research on women's low levels of participation in STEM fields in the region and what can be done to attract more girls and women into these fields. The study assesses the extent of the gender disparity in STEM fields, examines the root causes behind this gap, and proposes strategies to address it. The report includes findings from throughout Asia, while deeper analysis is offered on the situation in seven countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam. While the individual contexts of these countries vary and gender disparities differ in degree between them, patterns emerged that were apparent throughout the continent.

Where do we stand?

– Performance of 15 year old students in maths and science and participation in STEM fields appear to be linked - in countries where boys outperform girls in these subjects, a comparatively lower proportion of women are studying or working in STEM fields.

– The gender gap tends to be widest in specific STEM disciplines – far more women go into the "life sciences", such as biology and chemistry, for example, than physics, computer science or engineering.

– In STEM fields, the higher you go, the fewer women there are – in terms of both academic study and career path. Of 199 Nobel Laureates in physics for instance, only 2 were female.

What led us here?

– Teaching and learning materials often perpetuate gender stereotypes, a situation that may often reflect and exacerbate prevailing societal views on gender.

– Women are often underrepresented among teachers of STEM subjects, resulting in few role models for young girls.

– Females may experience higher rates of anxiety around maths and science due to a range of educational, psychosocial and economic factors, even when they excel at these subjects.

– Lower female participation in STEM fields means fewer role models for young women.

Where to from here?

– Gender-responsive action from governments, including in teacher education and policies on recruitment and a review of learning materials to guard against stereotyping is needed.

– Promotion of more role models in STEM for women and introducing gender responsive career counselling, as well as scholarship and mentoring opportunities for young women.

– The importance of parental and teacher encouragement cannot be underestimated.

“A Complex Formula” is the second in a series of studies that are part of a joint research initiative between UNESCO Bangkok and the Korean Women’s Development Initiative exploring issues of gender, learning achievement and transition to the labour market.

Discuss “A Complex Formula” on social media using the hashtag #STEMWomenAsia