

# Men for women in science

## New approach towards gender equality

**Implementing much-needed reforms improving gender equality in science must start with achieving broad support for such actions among all scientists. Thus, male researchers, who compose a great majority of Academia play a key role in changing the system from within. Over the last couple of years, high-profile men in positions of power founded and led several equality initiatives, whose impact on science has already been felt far and wide.**

As individuals, our way of thinking and being is strongly shaped by our communities. After all, the ability to collaborate is considered a superpower of our species. It enabled us to build complex, successful societies founded on mutual support. Bringing real change requires transforming attitudes and must start with changing hearts and minds. The most powerful way to do that is to form coalitions of people united by a common goal.

The academic community is no exception. Implementing much-needed reforms improving gender equality must start with achieving broad support among all scientists. Science needs women. And the world needs women in science to represent the perspective of all the people and thus accurately respond to the needs of the whole society. At this point, such notions are broadly accepted in the academic community. However, gender equality advocates agree that to make real progress, strong support among the majority of scientists is of paramount importance<sup>1</sup>. Still, less than 30% of researchers worldwide are women<sup>2</sup>. Thus, men in science play a key role in changing the system from within<sup>3</sup>.

*– My biggest hope is that more white men step up and prioritize improving equity, diversity, and inclusion in our field – says Sabine Stanley from the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, a women issues activist – We need to stop relying on women and underrepresented minorities to shoulder this burden<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, a great majority of the researchers advocating for underrepresented communities are female<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, over the last couple of years, male Academics founded and led several equality initiatives, whose impact has already been felt far and wide.*

In 2018, on the 20th anniversary of the Women in Science Programme, L’Oreal Foundation in partnership with UNESCO established the “Male Champions for Women in Science”. The goal of the project was to accelerate change and improve access to equal opportunities by creating a strong coalition of male allies<sup>3</sup>. The initiative was immediately joined by more than 20 eminent male scientists, known not only for their outstanding academic success, but more importantly, for being in positions of power. Among the leading figures of the movement are Professor Alain Fuchs, Chairman of the Université Paris Science et Lettres, and Professor Serge Abiteboul, Research Director of France’s National Computer Science Research Institute (INRIA) at the École Normale Supérieure. Professors Mark Ferguson, Director General of the Science Foundation Ireland, and Tom Welton, Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Imperial College in London, also joined the program. Professor Étienne Klein, Research Director of the Material Science Research Laboratory at the French Atomic Energy Commission said, that his support for “Male Champions for Women in Science” was obvious and added that already in Ancient Greece Plato had imagined a republic where “nothing prevented women from reaching the very highest positions”<sup>3</sup>.

Another impactful initiative underlining the unequivocal value of men allies is the HeForShe campaign launched by UN Women<sup>5</sup>. It was built around the core idea that gender inequality is an issue that affects all people, across all levels of societal function, from economy to politics. Thus, HeForShe was designed as a global effort seeking to involve men and boys in achieving equality by taking decisive action against gender stereotypes and hurtful behaviors towards women<sup>6</sup>. Since 2015, the initiative has been making significant strides in improving gender equality, including a marked reduction in sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the academic communities at Kenyatta University in Kenya and the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil<sup>7,8</sup>. Similar to the L’Oreal/UNESCO program, the global success of the HeForShe movement has been based on the support of high-profile men, who considered gender equality a priority. Remarkably, on the list of the HeForShe “Champions”, there are many movers and shakers of the business world, including Bob Sternfels, Global Managing Partner at McKinsey & Company, and Nick Read, CEO at Vodafone Group<sup>5</sup>.

Another impressive large-scale equality initiative is MenEngage. It is an alliance of over 1000 organizations working with men and boys in over 84 countries around the world, working together towards gender justice. A common interest of all members is to understand the impact of patriarchy on women and transform men's attitudes towards them. These goals are being achieved by the means of education, advocacy for policy change and economic rights, and gender-based violence prevention<sup>9</sup>. The global character and broad scope of the MenEngage actions provide a much-needed roadmap for achieving gender equality in Science and education across diverse cultural backgrounds.

One may wonder why so many powerful men even bothered to join in the gender equality efforts. Is it not women’s business to make it happen? As it turns out gender equality translates into the well-being of both, women and men. As shown by the data collected by the World Health Organization (WHO) men are healthier in the more gender-equal societies<sup>10</sup>. They also report more life satisfaction<sup>11</sup>, take better care of themselves, and even sleep better<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, men are much less likely to suffer from depression and commit suicide in communities where financial and other life obligations are shared more equitably between genders<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, men's participation in the equality efforts is personally beneficial for the activists themselves. Data shows that men who act as allies are highly valued in their Academic communities, while efforts to combat sexism are considered more legitimate when undertaken by all genders<sup>14</sup>.

In conclusion, the engagement of men, especially STEM leaders, in supporting girls and women has been critical for improving gender equality in Academia. Especially building multi-pronged institutional solutions to discrimination seems to be worthy of an all-hands-on-deck approach. Communal man efforts to fight discrimination towards women in Science illustrate the best of the Academic community. Together we stand strong.

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#### ABOUT WOMEN IN SCIENCE AT NENCKI



**Women in Science at Nencki (WISAN)** is a non-profit organization advocating for gender equality and promoting the interests of female scientists. It was established by a group of young female researchers from the Nencki Institute of Experimental Biology (Polish Academy of Sciences) to highlight the voices raising women’s and minorities’ issues to the forefront of societal discourse. For their work towards diversity and equality WISAN initiative has been awarded **ShEO Award 2021** by WPROST magazine. Even though the involvement of women in Academia has continually grown over the last decades, they are still heavily underrepresented in many fields and face

significant challenges at all levels of their careers. Still, only 30% of researchers are female (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Women in Science, Fact Sheet No. 55, June 2019. FS/2019/SCI/55).

#### ABOUT OUR UPCOMING EVENT

This month we bring three high-profile men from Academia and beyond to the table, during the "**NOT Yet Another Mainly Men Meeting**" panel discussion. Guests of the meeting:

- **prof. Jerzy Duszyński**, the President of the **Polish Academy of Science**
- **Steve Blum**, the Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives at **Yale Alumni Association**
- **dr Fredrik Bondestam**, the Director of the **Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research at the University of Gothenburg**

We will be talking about the benefits of diversity and gender equality in Academia. Men researchers, who compose a great majority of Academia play a key role in changing the system from within. Let them speak! We especially encourage our man colleagues to come and join the discussion.

The meeting would take place on **March 17<sup>th</sup>**, 5 PM CET/12 PM EDT/ 9 AM PDT (remotely on Zoom)

#### Patronage:

**President of the Foundation for Polish Science Prof. Maciej Żylicz**

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