
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2014

2:15–3:30pm

Girls and Women in STEM: Ways Forward to a Great Career

While the numbers of women in STEM careers globally are low, companies and governments are realizing that a way to catalyze growth, tackle unemployment and development is through the education and training of girls in STEM. It takes a concerted effort however, including policy changes within government, corporate commitments and a strong civil society to create the intended affects. Drawing on examples from Unilever’s engineering program and Women in Engineering, this conversation will highlight the policy and institutional changes that the industry should consider to increase low-income, female participation in the STEM field.

- Mechell Chetty, Vice President – HR (Central Africa), Unilever
- Larry Archary, Unilever
- Yusuf Vorajee, Executive Director, Jacobs-Matasis
- Moderator: Naadiya Moosajee, CEO & Co-Founder, WomEng

Context

- IMF report – Women, Work and Economy
 - Women make up more than 50% of the world population
 - 50% of women (who are of working age) are working
 - Majority of those women working are in unpaid work
 - Those women working with pay, earn less than men – up to 25% less
 - At a company level, companies that had women representation on their board, had earnings 4 percentage points higher than companies that had no women present
 - There is a lack of women in management and entrepreneurship and non-traditional career paths, like engineering
 - When women work, household income is higher and there is an increase in spending on girls education; a huge economic benefit.

Yusuf Vorajee, Executive Director, Jacobs-Matasis

- Jacobs is a global company.
- Gender inequality is a global problem.
- A gender-inclusive environment is important for organization and diversity.
- It’s important for an organization to have clear policies and guidelines and to separate personal values from company values.
- Engineering and other male-dominated fields need to find ways to be more inclusive.
- Women employees need role models in their organization – other women in management positions.
- Companies need to consistently monitor and measure gender inclusivity in an organized way.

Mechell Chetty, Vice President – HR (Central Africa), Unilever

- Gender inclusivity must have business benefit / reason.
- In the case of Unilever, 90% of their shoppers are female; they have purchasing and decision-making powers, plus are consuming more. Having female research and development (R&D) and brand development made sense.

- When companies pay attention to females, it benefits not only the individual, their families and communities as a whole.
- Do well by doing good: increase business while lowering negative impact on environment and communities.
- When advancing this agenda, it is important not to create a new divide (or male/gender inequity). Be gender inclusive.
- South Africa is only one of 2 countries in Unilever's portfolio that meets gender inclusivity targets.

Larry Archary, Unilever

- Need to have a belief in what we want to do.
- Companies that have gender inclusivity at its core make sense.
- Unilever has a volunteer program where engineering graduates mentor young girls, educate others, serve as an inter-office mentor and provide encouragement. In addition to being good CSR, it helps recruitment pipeline.
- Enabling programs to encourage retention.
- Men need to get involved – gender inclusion cannot be fought or led from outside.
- Need to have a sense of urgency – everyone needs to come together or all will suffer.

Q&A

- What can be done about self-imposed barriers?
 - Mechell: Females need to remember that before they got married, had children, etc. they had their own goals.
- In Mexico, like other countries in the world, females avoid STEM careers because of societal perceptions. What can be done to change this?
 - Mechell: Physical barriers are easy to control for, like creating a nursing station. However societal barriers are much more challenging.
 - Male figures are influential, as are government policies and sponsorships, to change mindsets.
 - Females are more likely to say that they won't do something than men and rationalize their decisions.
 - Have female role models and mentors who can show other females that they can still be feminine, etc.
 - Yusuf: Create environment where people are sensitive to the needs of women and are understanding.
 - Need champions, especially male champions, who see benefit of diversity
- What is the role for men? How do you involve men in discussions? How do we break glass ceilings?
 - Mechell: You don't integrate females into the corporate world, you create a new world
 - Yusuf: Need champions, especially male champions, who see benefit of diversity. Business is male dominated; some decisions are still made behind closed doors or in typical male environments. Therefore, having at least one male champion for gender inclusivity is key.
 - It is important to remember that each individual has specific traits or characteristics that are considered more feminine and masculine. A lot of the more appreciated traits are typically seen as more feminine. We have both sides within us and both sides are valued.
 - Use gender inclusive vocabulary.
 - Engineering is a problem solving profession and by changing the way it is understood, it helps to change mindsets and perceptions.

- Engineering is an expensive education. While around the world more females are enrolling in higher education than their male counterparts, engineering and other STEM tracks are still not attracting enough females, particularly in rural areas.
- Governments serious about gender inclusivity could consider removing barriers, such as expensive transportation, ensuring all workplaces are safe for female employees (including female restrooms) and making female employment a priority.
- What are the incentives?
 - EquipYouth is tracking employment rates by gender, but it is important to look closely at the quality of female employment – are pay, working conditions and other important criteria the same?
- How do you make systemic changes in work culture? How do you start conversation with employer about hiring women in technical trades?
- Naadiya
 - Females have a natural ability to persuade men.
 - When speaking with more resistant employers, encourage them to see female skill sets as an asset or benefit that they wouldn't necessarily get with male employees.
 - Highlight the positive dynamic that female employees bring to a team.
- Yusuf
 - People don't like talking about quotas, but they often work.
 - When you need to report and evaluate targets on a regular and consistent basis, it adds accountability.
 - Employers need to accept that females can do the same job as men.
 - Role models that support gender inclusivity are needed – and not only female role models – men can and should play this role too.
 - When a country has a female president or in government positions, it represents the ability for its citizens to see that a female can get the job done.
- Mechell
 - For Unilever, it is important that inflow, development and outflow phases are maintained and in balance, otherwise women will leave the company.
 - Strengthen quantity and quality of the female hiring pool.
 - Poaching strong female employees is a problem.
 - Need to look at why females leave company – career choices versus personal choices, pay, flexible and more inclusive work environment.
 - Companies need to invest resources and time to improve conditions.
 - Private and public sectors co-create internships, learnerships, etc. Governments can create incentives to reward companies to have gender inclusive policies, at least at the onset.
 - If companies get rewarded for meeting targets, suddenly positive changes will happen.
- Larry
 - Leadership needs to be fair, firm and consistent with their approach to gender inclusivity to maintain high quality and avoid tokenism.
 - To encourage females to enroll in STEM programs and stay in those careers, it is important to reach out to the families to jointly work through obstacles and remove barriers.
 - Lobbying is important.
- Yusuf
 - Have very clear policies and establish whistleblower procedures.