

Concept Note

2nd International Leadership Conference for Women in Higher Education

(WoH.E, 2019)

Theme: Promoting Women in Science to Address the 21st Century Challenges

March 6-8, 2019

Nairobi, Kenya

Conference Background

World over, the issue of inclusiveness of women, especially in leadership remains a major challenge. To date, women continue to have unequal opportunities as their male counterparts. African higher education, for instance, continues to see fewer women occupying leadership positions in the universities, polytechnics and research institutions among others. Indeed, very few women have risen to positions such as Vice-chancellors, Heads of Departments, Deans and Registrars across the continent.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 on Quality Education, and Women and Girl's Empowerment respectively recognise the importance of advancing gender parity in the process of striving to achieve the SDGs. Similarly, the African Union Commission (AUC), established its Centre for Education of Girls and Women in Africa (AU-CIEFFA) to, among others, provide guidance for Africa Member States to integrate gender perspectives in their programmes and in the implementation of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016-2025).

Taking the lead to drive women and young girls' equal participation in the higher education sector has been prime on the agenda of the Association of African Universities (AAU). As the apex organization and forum for consultation, exchange of information and co-operation among institutions of Higher Education in Africa, AAU is cognisant of the gender imbalances in African higher education and has thus been dedicated to ensuring gender inclusiveness in its various initiatives and projects. The promotion of gender equality is firmly rooted in the AAU's Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2020 where reference is made to expanding gender programmes to facilitate the attainment of objectives spelt out in the African Women's Decade (2010 -2020) Plan of Action. In this Strategic Plan, the AAU set out to organise special events and create platforms for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) stakeholders to discuss topical issues which serve as

catalysts for Africa's development, including Gender, Science, Technology and Innovation.

The International Leadership Conference for Women in Higher Education is one of such key platforms provided by AAU for the discussion of innovative and creative ways of empowering women, especially young women in higher education to reach their full potential and aspire to the topmost leadership positions in their chosen fields. The maiden edition, which was held in Accra, Ghana was highly successful and brought women across national and international boundaries together to share knowledge, ideas and strategic management skills required for success in various leadership positions.

Focus on Women in STEM

As reflected by the theme, the focus of the 2019 Conference is on Promoting Women in Science to Address the 21st Century Challenges.

Africa's progress is challenged by a myriad of problems ranging from lack of employment for its youth, the existence of tropical diseases, weak entrepreneurial drive and low levels of university-industry linkages, among others. It is widely accepted, that Science and Technology do have a key role to play in overcoming the continent's developmental challenges.

However, studies have revealed that though the number of women in science and engineering is growing, men continue to outnumber women, especially at the upper levels of these professions (AAUW, 2010). With only 24% of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) occupations being filled by women, various barriers, ranging from culture, implicit bias and subtle stereotyping to wilful ignorance and blatant discrimination have been identified as contributing factors (Pierce, Margo, 2013).

Africa needs to ensure that its human resource - both men and women, are fully engaged in the STEM fields in solving its developmental challenges, and thus should make significant investment into women in STEM to increase their contribution to solving the continent's challenges. The promotion of Women in Science to contribute massively and equally to a developed Africa must therefore form an integral part of various plans and strategies aimed at achieving the African Union's vision of '*Africa We Want*' by the year 2063.

AIM

The Conference seeks to:

- Inspire and empower the next generation of African women in STEM to actively and effectively contribute to solving Africa's Challenges.
- Provide the platform for women in STEM to share their cutting-edge research as a way of inspiring others.
- Build the leadership capacity of women in STEM to drive change and innovation in the STEM field.
- Draw attention to the important role of mentorship, through the provision of the platform for young scientists to interact with accomplished women scientists.
- Create the platform for various actors - educators, policy-makers and partners to debate on pertinent issues related to the promotion of Women in STEM.

CONFERENCE THEME AND SUBTHEMES

The Conference Theme is: Promoting Women in Science to Address the 21st Century Challenges. Based on the Conference theme, the AAU is calling for papers under the following subthemes:

- a) Addressing Africa's Challenges: the Role of Women in Science.
- b) Current Developments on Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Africa.
- c) Breaking the Glass Ceiling – Policies, Strategies and Mechanisms to support Women in STEM.
- d) Resource Mobilization Strategies to support STEM research.
- e) Barriers to Female Participation in STEM fields.

ACTIVITIES

- Presentation of Research Papers on the Conference subthemes
- Panel Discussions on Topical Issues
- Leadership Training Sessions
- Networking and Speed Mentoring Sessions

EXPECTED PARTICIPANTS

- Accomplished women in various leadership positions in STEM fields from all five regions of Africa
- STEM women academics and researchers in African HEIs.
- Women in industry, government and partner institutions involved in promoting STEM

SPONSORSHIP

Authors whose papers are accepted for presentation will be funded to make their presentation at the conference.

EVENT INFORMATION

Date: March 6-8, 2019

Venue: Nairobi, Kenya

Host: Centre for Innovative Leadership and Governance

Registration Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WoHE19>

NB: Though this is an all-female event, men who are willing to be involved in the process of developing and empowering women in STEM are also encouraged to get involved.

Participation Fee

The Conference Registration fee is \$ 200 for women participants; \$50 for female students; and \$300 for other participants

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