



## Building Bridges between Canadian and African Women in STEM

Ottawa, Canada

March 25-26, 2019

Misha Baudisch-McCabe, Gender Equality and Diversity Officer



### Event Summary:

AIMS was proud to be able to support the African and Canadian Women in STEM conference in Ottawa, Canada on March 25, 2019. The Challenges and Opportunities for women in STEM conference was organized within the broader framework of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science and the International Women's Day celebrations. Both days are a reminder

that women and girls play a critical role in science and technology and that their participation must be strengthened, especially in Africa. The morning roundtable featured insight from AIMS alumni, Eva Lilliane Ujeneza. AIMS Alumni Comfort Mintah also attended and contributed as a participant at the roundtable.

On the morning of March 25 at the office of IDRC by invitation only, AIMS' Gender Equality and Diversity Officer moderate the morning roundtable made up of 40 inspiring women in STEM from across Africa and Canada. The roundtable was hosted by H.E. Ambassador of Senegal Vivianne Laure Bampassy and IDRC President, Dr Jean Lebel. The roundtable sought to establish frameworks on how best to improve the participation of women in the STEM sector. At AIMS, we believe it is critical for women to be part at the table in order to address the gender gap in STEM. Bringing together African and Canadian female scientists led to robust and animated discussion around current challenges and barriers informing the gender gap in STEM and how we can collectively increase women's participation in the STEM sector both in Canada and across Africa.

What became apparent early on in the discussion is that women are facing many of the same barriers in Canada as they are across Africa. Some of the challenges identified included:

1. Acknowledging that there is a big gender gap in STEM both in Canada and across Africa
2. This leads to women feeling isolated and missing out on





research opportunities due to informal conversations that take place among male researchers

3. Lack of mentorship opportunities for women
4. Women tend to gravitate towards sciences where they can see the societal impact
5. Women face the pressures of their biological clock and pressure to have children.

Challenges specifically faced across Africa include a lack of funding for women in STEM and a lack of data available in Africa to monitor and address the gender gap in STEM

Despite these challenges, the esteemed participants were also eager to share best practices from their respective countries. Canadian women in STEM shared how the government provides parental leave for women and men, has dedicated research chairs for women, and eh requirement for researchers to apply for grants as a team that includes women. From Rwanda we learned about the provision of dedicated scholarships for women to attend university. From Egypt, we heard how the introduction of gender equality legislation led to higher numbers of women in engineering. In Senegal, we discussed the thriving female entrepreneurial sector, with many more examples from across the continent.

In order to tackle some of these key challenges, the participants proposed the following solutions and actions:

- We need to ensure funding is made available to support women scientists and provide seed funding for entrepreneurship





- We must fund programs that will push the younger generation to connect innovation to creativity. This includes moving from STEM to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math).
- There should be diverse representation in the classroom and reflected in the knowledge produced by fostering inclusive participation.
- We need to ensure we have political buy in and put the legal frameworks in place to promote and uphold gender equality in STEM.
- Men must be engaged in dialogues and work together as allies to address the gender gap.
- Importantly, we need to link women to one another to foster collaboration.



In order to harness the energy from today, we are pleased to announce the inception of a Canada-Africa peer network for women scientists, endorsed by the Governor General of Canada. This network will allow for a continuation of the riveting discussion started at the roundtable and move us towards a concrete action plan to increase the participation of women in STEM.

### Event Highlights

- Alongside H.E. Ambassador of Senegal and the President of IDRC, Gender Equality and Diversity Officer moderated a roundtable in the morning bringing together 40 African and Canadian women in STEM for an engaging conversation.
- Launch of a peer network of African and Canadian scientists to continue the conversation, which is very exciting and has the endorsement of the Governor General. This network will serve to move towards a concrete action plan to increase participation of women in STEM.
- The Deputy Minister for International Development from the Government of Canada was the keynote and she spoke extensively about AIMS.
- AIMS had one alumni as a speaker at the morning roundtable to share her insight around research and scholarship in STEM and speak about AIMS.
- AIMS had two alumni on a panel in the afternoon conference, who also did a wonderful job sharing their positive experience with AIMS and the work they're doing.
- AIMS was mentioned frequently throughout the conference, so it was great exposure with many representatives from GAC, embassies, and universities present.