

Looking Forward to Improving Gender Equality in Science

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: “My observations on national education are obviously hints; but I principally wish to enforce the necessity of educating the sexes together to perfect both”.¹

In 2014, we are witnessing a critical and unacceptable situation in Nigeria caused by the obscurantism and blindness of the Boko Haram and by a country that seems not prepared to deal with gender equality.

However, the situation of the woman's rights is even worse because, even in modern European Community, according to a recent report by Serena Kutchinsky: “data compiled by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), who interviewed 42,000 women from 28 member states, it revealed that one in three women has been either physically or sexually abused”.² Surprisingly, “countries with the highest levels of gender equality reported the highest levels of gender violence. The supposedly liberal Nordic nations came out the worst with Denmark (52%), Finland (47%) and Sweden (46%). The UK fared little better coming in fifth”.²

How about the role of women in science? How is the situation in Brazil?

There are many angles through which we can look at this question, but to make a long history short let us look at some data presented by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) when celebrating the International Women's Day on March, 8th. According to this Brazilian federal agency, the participation of women in research fellowships is 36%. This is considered by academia as a certificate of excellence in research. On the other hand, when looking at studentships for undergraduate students in sciences, 56% are women. It clearly means that the paths to go higher in the science career ladder are bigger for women than for men.

This aspect reminds us of an oral statement by Professor Montserrat Filella (University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland) during the 16th National Meeting of Analytical Chemistry (ENQA) held in Campos do Jordão in October, 2011. Professor Montserrat mentioned that she was happy to attend a scientific meeting with many motivated young scientists and such a high percentage of women; however, she also pointed out that she had seen many women in the audience, but not many of them delivering oral presentations or invited lectures.

Moving forward in science career must not be biased by gender or any other particularity as race or nationality. Moving forward in science career should be related to dedication and efforts towards the expansion of human knowledge.

Fortunately, we see lights in our horizons. A beautiful sign is the 2014 edition of the CAPES-Elsevier Award honoring ten Brazilian women with remarkable contributions in Science. In Chemistry, we certainly can celebrate cheerfully because seven of these women are contributing in chemical science and related areas. Cheers!

According to one award-recipient, Professor Vanderlan Bolzani, “Science is predominantly male, even with all the advances we have climbed over time. Hopefully this award encourages women. I grew up in an environment where books had no female characters. I believe that throughout this process, women with much struggle, high performance, intense vigor, and, above all, with passion are writing a new story, where books begin to have female characters.”

It is important to remember that the 2010 edition of the CAPES-Elsevier Award also recognized ten women.

However, there is a long road ahead and it is worth remembering that so far of the 165 individuals awarded with the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, only four are women. It is remarkable that one of them, Marie Curie, also has won a Nobel Prize in Physics, and other one, Irène Joliot-Curie, is her daughter.

We do congratulate all women working for the advancement of sciences.

Let us together build a smooth science career road absolutely free of any gender bias. It is always time to avoid losing the full brain force of all humanity.

A recent editorial of the *American Scientist* magazine states that “*American Scientist* has a long history of featuring authors from underrepresented groups in science. We support the philosophy that the value of diversity lies in creating a scientific community that is more creative and more inclusive of all ideas”.³

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References

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3. Editorial, *American Scientist*, May-June, **2014**, 162.