

Next Einstein Forum to nurture African talent

The first Next Einstein Forum Global Gathering, which ran in Dakar from 8-10 March 2016, has called for increased investment and support for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in Africa.



Presidents with female NEF Fellows

Source: Next Einstein Forum

“The NEF Global Gathering is providing a platform to nurture African talent so the continent can return to its roots as the cradle of innovation,” said Macky Sall, President of Senegal. “Africa has a rich history of science, as does Senegal, and we are creating a ‘city of knowledge’ as proof of our commitment to investing in the education of our youth. Science must better our society. I would like to especially salute our women scientists because a future without diversity is not representative of our society. At the heart of our policy is to put an accent on the education of women and girls and the support of STEM. Together, we must meet the challenge of producing the next African Einstein- be it a man or a woman.”

“Many local challenges have global consequences and finding sustainable solutions will require transformative thinking, strong leadership, significant investment and deeper engagement. We are thrilled to welcome the world to Dakar to witness Africa’s emergence on the global scientific stage,” said Thierry Zomahoun, NEF chairperson and president, and CEO of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS).

Lack of research loses billions

Science and technology-driven innovation is an engine for economic growth and social inclusion. Today, a lack of investment in R&D and STEM fields is stunting Africa’s growth, as the continent contributes just 1% of global research output while losing 35% of aid – ie \$4 billion – each year to STEM-related expatriate jobs. An initiative of AIMS, in partnership with the Robert Bosch Stiftung, is close the STEM deficit and empower a new generation of scientific genius.

“Africa is global talent pool of the future, provided we work together now to make the necessary investments. Three principles derived from our experience have been very helpful to us in transforming Rwanda. First, always work in a spirit of partnership and collaboration, within Africa and globally. Second, we cannot afford to wait around, so get started on the journey using our own resources, ideas and institutions. Third, women are at least half of our talent pool, and progress is impossible without their full participation at every level,” said Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda.

Spotlighting African women in STEM

In honour of International Women's Day, the NEF Global Gathering 2016 hosted a panel discussion reflecting on the progress in promoting African women in STEM, ongoing innovative initiatives and future opportunities.

The panel, 'Driving the agenda for African women in STEM', featured women leaders and influencers in science, including France Cordova, director, US National Science Foundation, Aminata Sall Diallo, professor and special advisor in the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and Naledi Pandor, Minister of Science and Technology, South Africa.

"As a woman with a science background working in a STEM-related field, the value of mentorship and support from other women cannot be overstated," said Seema Kumar, VP, innovation, global public health and science policy communication, Johnson & Johnson, who also participated on the panel. "The Next Einstein Forum provides a place for women in the sciences from all over Africa to connect with each other and with leaders in the sciences from across the globe. Working together, we are better able to break down barriers to success and push the boundaries of science and technology."

Inaugural NEF Fellow class

Women make up 40% of the inaugural NEF Fellow class, 15 of Africa's best and the brightest scientists, rigorously selected for their groundbreaking contributions to science. Representing the continent's rising class of STEM talent, these trailblazers include:

- Alta Schutte, South Africa
- Amanda Weltman, South Africa
- Assane Gueye, Senegal
- Axel Ngonga-Nomo, Cameroon
- Evelyn Gitau, Kenya
- Ghada Bassioni, Egypt
- Hallowed Olaoluwa, Nigeria/Central African Republic
- Joseph Ben Geloun, Senegal
- Kommunist Weldemariam, Ethiopia
- Mohlopheni Jackson Marakalala, South Africa
- Mouhamed Moustapha Fall, Senegal
- Noble Banadda, Uganda
- Sherien Elagroudy, Egypt
- Tolu Oni, Nigeria
- Wilfred Ndifon, Cameroon

The diversity of the group punctuates the NEF's concerted efforts to build an inclusive, globally competitive scientific community. Also unique to the NEF is a youth-focused and driven agenda with least 50% of the NEF Global Gathering participants aged 42 or younger.

By building on its wealth of human capital – a young, largely unemployed and wholly untapped pool of talent – Africa is poised to emerge as a leader in the global scientific community. The 2016 NEF Global Gathering will help make this vision a reality by combining the unique perspectives and resources offered by government, academia, industry and public and private sectors, to strengthen Africa's science infrastructure.

For more information, go to www.IamEinstein.org.

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