



AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT

SCHOLAR ACTIVISTS
FOR IMPACT & LEARNING
FOR CHANGE CLUSTER



REPORT ON THE PANEL DISCUSSION

CELEBRATING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

FOSTERING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION
AND LEADERSHIP IN THE JOBS OF
TOMORROW

DISCLAIMER

About the author(s)

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SUPPORTING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN STEM

2025 marks the 30th Anniversary of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPfA) which remains, to this day, the most revolutionary and progressive global framework for advancing women's rights and gender equality. In the [Secretary General's Beijing+30 report](#), the [12 critical areas of concern](#) of the BPfA are clustered into six thematic chapters, which align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to harness the synergies between the two frameworks.

One of the thematic chapters focuses on *Women and the Digital Revolution* and aims at ensuring that women and girls can reap the economic benefits of the digital revolution, accessing new skills, opportunities and services, by bridging the digital gender gap and providing equal access to digital technology, financial services, markets and networks.

Despite women achieving near parity in higher education, they remain underrepresented in key fields of the Fourth Industrial Revolution like digital IT, computing, physics, mathematics, and engineering. This disparity highlights a critical gap at advanced levels and in sectors crucial for future job markets, such as artificial intelligence and engineering, where skill shortages could be an opportunity for change. To close this gap, we need to start breaking stereotypes, promoting role models, supporting women in their advancement by fostering inclusive spaces and targeted programs through actions and policies that promote an inclusive, diverse, and equitable world.¹

Representing 33.3 per cent of all researchers worldwide, only 12 per cent of member of national science academies are women, while only 22 per cent of the labor force in artificial intelligence is currently composed of women. According to the latest data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 41% of scientists in Arab States are women. Moreover, the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report highlighted that women's representation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is only at 28.2 per cent, while women make up one-tenth of leaders in the STEM workforce.²

While the recognition of STEM fields as critical to national economies has recognizably increased, no country has yet achieved gender equality in STEM. Women continue to be underrepresented in STEM education, despite increased girls' enrolment in school in recent years, as gender biases, stereotypes and the global digital divide disproportionately prevent women and girls from accessing online STEM information and opportunities.³

In Lebanon, it is estimated that more than 80 per cent of women and girls are currently enrolled in disciplines such as Arts, Sciences, and Education, reflecting their strong engagement in shaping culture, knowledge, and society (LLWB, 2025). Meanwhile, only 16 per cent are pursuing studies in STEM fields, where increased participation is crucial to ensure that women and girls are equally represented in future-ready industries such as ICT, green technologies, and artificial intelligence.

Celebrating the 2025 International Day of Women and Girls in Science in Lebanon

In December 2015, the United Nations General Assembly established an annual International Day to recognize the critical role women and girls play in science and technology. The *International Day of Women and Girls in Science*, celebrated on 11 February each year, is globally implemented jointly by UNESCO and UN Women, in collaboration with civil society organizations and other key institutions to promote full and equal access and participation in science for women and girls.⁴

In celebration of the **10th anniversary** of this International Day, *Scholar Activists for Impact & Learning for Change* (SAIL for Change) cluster at the American University of Beirut (AUB),⁵ in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), held a Panel Discussion on AUB Campus to explore the challenges, achievements, and future opportunities for women and girls in STEM.

The event was attended by **70 participants**, both online and in-person, including university faculty deans, members and students, MPs, UN Women, UNESCO and other key stakeholders. Audience members engaged actively, sharing their work across STEM fields and following up on the panelists' interventions. Specific reactions included questions on

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/women-and-girls-in-science-day>

² <https://www.un.org/en/observances/women-and-girls-in-science-day/>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/2/feature-sticking-points-in-stem>

⁴ <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/women-girls-science>

⁵ [AUB-SAIL for Change](#) is a cluster under the Provost Office at AUB, which bridges academic knowledge for the co-creation of local solutions with the communities, focusing on five initiatives: business, education, environment, health, and AI & data analytics.

biodiversity conservation, strong interest in Asmaa's work and its impact on health-tech innovation, and inquiries on institutional policies promoting gender equality in science.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science – Panel Composition

The panel featured experts from various fields, each bringing distinguished perspectives on the intersection between gender equality, women's empowerment, institutional reforms and science:

- **MP Aoun Saliba, Najat** – Scientist, Environmentalist, Member of the Lebanese Parliament, and Recipient of the L'Oréal-UNESCO International Award for Women in Science.
- **Ms. Chams Ibrahimchah, Maya** – Founder of Beit el Baraka, a charity supporting marginalized communities in Lebanon, and social enterprise Beit Kanz.
- **Dr. Gharios, Georges** – National Programme Officer at UNESCO-Beirut, specializing in water resource management and biodiversity conservation.
- **Ms. Moubayed Bissat, Lamia** – Governance Specialist, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration, and Head of the Institute of Finance Basil Fuleihan.
- **Ms. Serhan, Asmaa** – Biomedical Engineer, Founder of **Tech خطو** and **Salamati**, and innovator in health-tech solutions.
- **Ms. Rita Hayek** (Moderator) – Lebanese Actress, working towards the advancement of women's representation in media and arts.



Group Picture: Panelists and Organizers.

A special intervention was given by **Dr. Anthony Rahayel**, ex-dentist turned into food blogger and content creator, internationally known for promoting Lebanese culinary heritage and small businesses which focused its interventions on leveraging social media to expand reach and professional engagement.

Key Discussion Points

The panel discussion covered key topics such as barriers to women's participation in STEM fields, including challenges in education, career advancement, and societal pressures. Panelists shared success stories and personal experiences, highlighting role models and lessons learned. They also explored the role of institutions and evidence-based policymaking in fostering inclusivity through policy recommendations, mentorship, and funding strategies. The discussion addressed intersectionality in STEM by considering gender, socio-economic, and regional disparities, while examining future strategies to support the next generation of women in STEM.

Highlights from Panelists' Interventions:

- **MP Najat Aoun Saliba:** Shared her journey from academia to politics, emphasizing the need to relate science to real-world and daily life applications.
- **Ms. Lamia Moubayed Bissat:** Discussed the role of evidence-based policymaking and data production in sustainable development and governance – unlocking opportunities to design inclusive and gender-responsive national

programming and interventions.

- **Dr. Georges Gharios:** Outlined UNESCO's initiatives to support women in science and the importance of long-term retention in STEM fields, while providing care mechanisms and institutions to support women's equal participation in the labor market.
- **Ms. Maya Chams Ibrahimchah:** Emphasized the critical role of science in NGO work, particularly in sustainable development, poverty reduction, and access to vulnerable communities.
- **Ms. Asmaa Serhan:** Encouraged young women to pursue STEM entrepreneurship, sharing her inspiring innovation journey in health-tech, and highlighting concrete pathways to support young women entrepreneurs from education to product marketization.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The panel yielded several concrete recommendations for advancing women in STEM, including:

1. **Integrating Real-World Applications into STEM Education** – Institutions should highlight diverse STEM career paths through interactive panels and case studies starting in primary and secondary education institutions. This includes engagement with the Ministry of Education in Lebanon to mainstream efforts for increased enrollment of students, especially young girls and young women in STEM disciplines.
2. **Developing Inclusive and Gender-Responsive Policies** – Increase female representation and leadership in decision-making roles through transparent recruitment and promotion processes, as well as support the development and implementation of sectoral policies and plans that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
3. **Supporting Young Women Scientists** – Expand programs like L'Oréal-UNESCO for Women in Science to recognize and fund women researchers, as well as to provide them with a platform for increasing their visibility.
4. **Enhancing Data Production, Collection and Use** – Scale-up the collection, production and use of gender-sensitive data to support evidence-based policymaking addressing gaps in STEM and in any other sectors. This includes expanding digital literacy by ensuring access to technology at early stages with a particular focus on rural areas and young girls.
5. **Providing Microcredit Financing for Women** – Provide financial support for female-led enterprises to promote long-term sustainability. Additionally, to increase funding for women-led startups by supporting scientific entrepreneurship through targeted grants and investment funds.
6. **Initiating Guidance Programs in Schools** – Introduce mentorship and orientation programs to support young women's educational and career choices.
7. **Promoting Hands-On STEM Learning** – Establish innovation labs and experiential learning opportunities with specific efforts to support the participation of young women in those spaces.
8. **Enhancing Networking Opportunities** – Organize science fairs, mentorship programs, and industry collaborations to inspire new generations of young women scientists, while supporting networking among women and profiling female role models in the field.

IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

This panel contributed to awareness raising and to create momentum to advance gender equity in science. It successfully highlighted the critical role of women in STEM, celebrating their achievements and addressing the challenges they face. By fostering an inclusive scientific community, we ensure that **“Women need science, and science needs women.”**⁶

We extend our gratitude to the panelists, organizers, and attendees for making this event a success. Let's continue

⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/women-and-girls-in-science-day>

working towards a future where women and girls have full and equal access to science and technology.

The event recording and related resources will be made available on the AUB-SAIL for Change website, and organizers will ensure to sustain the momentum by exploring other initiatives opportunities promoting women in STEM.

The Role of Scholar Activism

Scholar activism plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between academia and real-world societal challenges. By combining research with grassroots action, scholar activists can drive meaningful change, ensuring that evidence-based knowledge informs policy and public discourse. Events like this panel discussion exemplify how scholar activists at AUB and beyond are fostering inclusive dialogues, advocating for evidence-based policies, and mentoring the next generation of women in science. But real change goes beyond a single event. To truly bridge the gender gap in science, we need to think long-term—building connections with communities, creating sustainable initiatives, and ensuring that policies translate into action. It's about moving from conversations to commitments, from ideas to impact. By working together across disciplines and sectors, we can help shape a world where equal opportunities in science aren't just an aspiration but a reality.

APPENDIX

Visibility on Social Media:

Instagram:



unwomenlebanon  ...

unwomenlebanon  ميدان العلوم يحتاج النساء والفتيات
 بمناسبة الاحتفالية العاشرة لليوم الدولي للمرأة والفتاة في ميدان العلوم، أقيمت حلقة نقاش ضمت متحدثين بارزين شاركوا في التحديات التي يواجهونها وقدموا النصائح للفتيات والطموحات في ميدان العلوم.

 [Science needs women & girls](#)
 To celebrate the 10th anniversary of International Day of Women & Girls in Science, a panel discussion featured distinguished speakers who shared their challenges & provided advice for aspiring women & girls in science

 [WomenInScience](#) [#DWGS](#) [#EveryVoiceInScience](#) [#النساء_في_العلوم](#) [#STEM](#)
 8w See translation



unesco.beirut and 2 others  ...

unesco.beirut  🏆 On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the International Day of Women & Girls in Science [#DWGS](#), an inspiring panel at [@aub_sail](#) in collaboration with [@unesco.beirut](#) and [@unwomenlebanon](#) brought together speakers who shared their personal journeys, challenges, and advice to empower the next generation of women in [#STEM](#). 🌟🌟

 On [#WomenInScience](#) Day, let's amplify her voice and celebrate [#EveryVoiceInScience](#). Together, let's continue to inspire, advocate for change, and build a future where science is accessible for all. 💡
 🌈🌱
 8w

    
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RECAP

CELEBRATING THE 10th ANNIVERSARY OF THE

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE



Speaker
ASMAA SERHAN
Engineer, Innovator & Founder of SALMATI

Watch the full session on our website



aub_sail
Original audio



aub_sail On #InternationalWomensDay, we celebrate innovation and determination.

In this recap, @asmaa_serhan shares her journey of creating a smart medical device, informed by the Lebanese crises, and driven by passion and skill.

Rather than standing out as an exception, women in innovation should be one of many, shaping the future alongside everyone else and creating meaningful impact in communities.

View insights

Boost reel

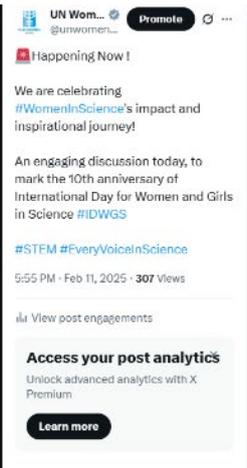


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 **UN Women Lebanon**
Published by Rawad Al Feghali
February 12

Science needs women & girls

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of International Day of Women & Girls in Science, a panel discussion featured distinguished speakers who shared their challenges & provided advice for aspiring women & girls in science.

ميدان العلوم يحتاج النساء والفتيات
بمناسبة الاحتفالية العاشرة لليوم الدولي للمرأة والفتاة في ميدان العلوم، أقيمت حلقة نقاش ضمت متحدثين بارزين أثاروا التحديات التي يواجهونها وقدموا النصائح للنساء والفتيات الطموحات في ميدان العلوم.

#WomenInScience #IDWGS #EveryVoiceInScience #STEM# #النساء في العلوم

cc UN Women UN Women Arabic United Nations Lebanon United Nations Information Centre Beirut UNESCO UNESCO Office in Beirut SAIL for Change-AUB



 **SAIL for Change-AUB is with Najat Aoun Saliba - نجات عون صليبا and 2 others.**
13 February

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#WomenInScience #STEM #IDWGS



