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# 1998-2008 : Ten Years of Partnership between UNESCO and L'ORÉAL Promoting Women in Science

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In 1998, the "For Women in Science" Prize was awarded for the first time, to four women scientists of international stature for their research in the life sciences.

The prize was original on more than one account: it was the first scientific prize awarded to women; it recognized the world-wide scope of research by rewarding scientists working on different continents, and it was created by UNESCO in partnership with a private company, namely L'ORÉAL.

Ten years on, the UNESCO-L'ORÉAL partnership "For Women in Science" has become a far-reaching programme involving more than 500 women scientists worldwide.

For its part, L'ORÉAL, had a large research department in which men and women worked together as equals.

It was upon this common basis that the two organisations decided to unite their efforts to promote women in scientific research, starting with the creation of a prestigious prize which would showcase the most eminent among them.

### An Original Partnership

What led to this partnership between an intergovernmental Organization and the largest cosmetics company? Despite their differences, the two partners found common ground around women and research.

## FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE



L'ORÉAL  
FONDATION  
D'ENTREPRISE

### The Partnership in 2008

What has become of the UNESCO-L'ORÉAL partnership 10 years after the creation of the prize?

*The international context at the time:* In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing strongly denounced inequalities between men and women in all sectors. Until then, women's under-representation in science and technology had not attracted the attention of the international community. The most common explanation for this under-representation was that "women just didn't like science". The Beijing Conference suggested another way of ordering that phrase, namely: "science just doesn't like women".

*Each of the partners had its strengths;* Following the Beijing Conference, in 1996, UNESCO launched its first special project "Women, Science and Technology" in the Natural Sciences Sector.

The partnership has grown rapidly, with the launch of the International Fellowships for Women in Science in 2000, and then National Fellowships in 2001, not to mention the substantial increase in the value of the prizes and the fellowships. Today the programme includes the following:

- Five annual UNESCO-L'ORÉAL Prizes, of US\$ 100,000 each, aimed at rewarding leading women in the life sciences or materials science in five different regions: Africa and the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Europe and North America.

### **The Situation of Women Scientists around The World:**

UNESCO's 2006 statistics show that the percentage of women in research is 43% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 17% in Asia (excluding China), 30% in Western Europe and 31% in Africa (where there is scant data).

Despite relative parity with men at the beginning of their university careers, in Europe, women hold less than 15% of the science professorships.

Of the 521 Nobel Prizes awarded between 1901 and 2007, just 12 went to women, including two to Marie Curie.

- Fifteen annual International UNESCO-L'ORÉAL Fellowships, valued at US\$ 40,000 each, to allow young post-doctoral women in the life sciences or materials science to pursue research in the laboratory of their choice for two years.

- L'OREAL National Fellowships, with the support of UNESCO's National Commissions, to help young students to pursue a scientific career.

The Prizes are awarded by two International Juries (one for the life sciences and one for materials science) and have been chaired by Nobel Prize winners (Professors Christian de Duve, Günter Blobel, Pierre-Gille de Gennes and Ahmed Zewail).

Between 1998 and 2008, 52 UNESCO-L'ORÉAL Prize winners have been distinguished for their work and 120 International Fellowships in 67 countries have encouraged young women scientists to pursue their research. National Fellowships, in place in 35 countries, have helped 340 young women to pursue a career in science. Over 500 hundred women scientists have thus been rewarded or encouraged. This number should double by the end of 2009.

Contact : Renée Clair  
[r.clair@unesco.org](mailto:r.clair@unesco.org)

Links:  
[www.forwomeninscience.com](http://www.forwomeninscience.com)

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