



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Draft

**Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the ECOSOC Side Event on “Women in
Science – a necessity?”**

Geneva, 2 July 2013

Mr Rolf-Dieter Heuer, Director-General of the *European
Organization for Nuclear Research* (CERN),

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Professor Okeke,

Thank you for coming to this Side Event on Women in Science.

I wish to thank our partners in the CERN and the *International
Federation of University Women* for joining forces to put women
on the agenda of the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review.

I think we all agree we live in a new age of limits -- in terms of
resources, in the terms of the boundaries of the planet.

This means we must make far more of the boundless, renewable
energy that is human ingenuity. We must release the full powers

of innovation, to craft new solutions that are inclusive, just and sustainable.

This is why gender equality in the sciences is so vital.

This is an issue of human rights.

It is also a breakthrough strategy for sustainable development.

This breakthrough will not happen if we exclude fifty percent of our brain power, fifty percent of our creative genius.

Professor Francesca Okeke, *UNESCO / L'Oreal Laureate* from Nigeria, shows the power of women in science.

But studies show she is an exception.

In 2010, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimated that only 29 percent of the world's researchers were women.

According to UNESCO's *2010 Global Education Digest*, consistent gender disparities prevail at most stages of education in science and technology and in most regions of the world.

This is especially true when women seek to cross the gap between education and professional life.

This leaves few women scientists in top managerial positions, few women patenting their discoveries, and very few women (5 to 10 percent) – as the recent edition of *Nature* shows – in the scientific boards of high-tech companies...

We are facing a vicious circle that starts early and gathers pace -- as girls get older, as drop-out rates increase, as disparities are compounded by marginalization, funding disparities, non-family friendly working conditions, and lack of recognition.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must do more to inspire girls and women to lead.

This is why, for the past 15 years, UNESCO has partnered with L'Oréal to promote women in scientific research.

Every year, we award 15 *UNESCO--L'Oreal International Fellowships* to promising young women researchers and five *UNESCO-L'Oreal Women in Science Awards* to exceptional women researchers.

Today, this is a global programme, bringing together more than 1700 women in 108 countries.

Professor Okeke embodies the spirit of this Award. Two laureates went on to win the Nobel Prize in 2009 – Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn from the United States of America in Medicine and Dr. Ada Yonath from Israel for Chemistry.

We should not underestimate the importance of role models.

This goes to the heart of UNESCO's mission.

We seek to strengthen the links between education, training, science and technology and the labour market – including through networks that underpin the role of women.

This includes eight *UNESCO University Chairs* in Gender, Science and Technology – in Argentina, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Togo, and Pakistan.

We also work upstream -- to support national STI policies in Member States, especially in least developed countries.

In April 2012, UNESCO organized the *First African Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for Youth Employment, Human Capital Development and Inclusive Growth*, with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, in Nairobi, Kenya.

We are also active on the ground.

In partnership with GEMS Education, we lead a project in Kenya and Lesotho, to improve girls' and women's advancement in sciences, mathematics and technology.

With the Barefoot College (India), we have launched a programme to train illiterate rural women, starting in Africa, to become local entrepreneurs in solar technology.

These projects are part of the UNESCO *Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education*, to target the weak links of girls' secondary education and women's literacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History shows the importance of pioneers in making things happen, and I believe we have pioneers today in this room.

It is important today that we keep in mind the pioneers outside this room, who are blazing new trails, sometimes against all odds.

Young girls and women are changing the world.

We must support them. Through science, technology and innovation, we must give them new tools and skills to shape a better future for us all.

Thank you.