



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# 8 MARCH INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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Mary Allen Wilkes, programmer, with a  
LINC at M.I.T. in the early 1960's.  
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## Reflections from Ms Saniye Gülser Corat, UNESCO's Director for Gender Equality

### “Women in the Digital Space”

8 March 2019

Remarkable but Invisible?

When I think about remarkable women, especially those who have contributed to the world of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, I always remember an obituary in the New York Times, published in March 2013 about Yvonne Brill. The obituary honoured her with the title “world’s best mom” who “followed her husband from job to job and took eight years off from work to raise three children.” By the way, she also made a mean beef stroganoff – according to the same obituary.

It was curious that the NY Times would publish an obituary for a woman who sounds like a well-appreciated wife and mother. It is only in the second paragraph that we learn the reason for the obituary. Yvonne Brill was also a brilliant rocket scientist who invented a propulsion system to keep communications satellites in orbit – a technology we use widely and globally today without ever wondering about who invented it.

There are hundreds, if not thousands of women scientists whose work benefits us all today, but whose names are not even mentioned in the scientific journals. The unconscious bias and gender stereotypes keep us believing in the myth that women are not good enough, or interested, in science.

Jenny Rohn, a biologist exploring the reason for the dearth of women at the top of her field (despite gender parity in the number of PhDs achieved in biology) points to the role prejudices play: “Picture a scientist in your head: the image is likely to be male. We’re just wired that way.”

But this picture in our heads of eccentric, absent-minded men as the only noteworthy scientists does not reflect reality. It is a myth.

What is not a myth is that women are typically under-represented in STEM: less than a third of women work in scientific research and development globally, and despite the growing importance of STEM knowledge and digital skills, the percentage of women in these fields is growing at a painfully slow pace – by only 4% from 2008 to 2016.

UNESCO advocates and works proactively to contribute to the representation and advancement of girls and women in STEM education and careers. To celebrate International Women's Day in 2019, we are shedding a spotlight on new technologies and the digital world. Through the organization of a debate on Women Online: Challenges for Gender Equality in the Digital Space, we will highlight the experiences of distinguished speakers who are committed to advancing women's empowerment in the digital space. Through the second edition of our #Wiki4Women campaign, organized in collaboration with the Wikimedia Foundation, we will continue to promote and produce data on women on the Internet. Last but not least, we have designed a travelling exhibition entitled Remarkable Women in Technology that will put a woman's face on some of the most interesting work in fields such as quantum physics and artificial intelligence.

Join us at UNESCO to make remarkable women visible, and provide an inspiration to all girls and women to take the leap and pursue education and careers in STEM.