

Notes taken by students
International Symposium
Education and Gender Equality
Wellesley College, October 20 & 21, 2017

Plenary Session – Saturday, 9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. – Promoting gender equality in the public and private sectors

Speakers:

- Stéphanie Seydoux, General Inspector of Social Affairs, French Minister of Social Affairs
- Nathalie Bajos, Director of the promotion of equality and the same access to rights at Le Défenseur des Droits
- Caren Grown, Senior Director for Gender at the World Bank Group
- Bochra Bel Haj Hmida, Lawyer at the Court of Cassation and Member of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People in Tunisia
- Deborah Dean, Vice-President and General Counsel-Americas for Dassault Systèmes
- Matthew DiGuseppe, Vice-President, Head of Americas on the Asset Stewardship Team of State Street Global Advisors (SSGA)
- Françoise Vergès, « Global South(s) » chairholder of the “Collège d’Etudes Mondiales” at the Fondation des Sciences de l’Homme

Moderator:

- Rosanna Hertz, Reunion Professor of Sociology and Women’s and Gender Studies at Wellesley College

Main points:

- Quotas work and we have to use them to ensure gender parity. In France, most large companies respect the quota of 40% women, because otherwise, they are fined. To find women to fill this quota worldwide we must invest in their education at the primary education levels.
- Gender-based violence can be addressed by funding the training of police officers, the judicial system, doctors, and national education employers so that they understand what violence looks like, as well as broadening the indicators of violence in the law.
- It is not because employees are women that a company is performing better, but because the application of the principle of non-discrimination has made it possible to choose more competent people to run the company.
- Most gender-based legal discrimination exists in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Legal economic discrimination leads to less female labor force participation. Changing the laws and policies is not enough (laws are not enforced and take a long time to change).
- Women need assets, such as bank accounts, property registration under their own names, and digital finance access, in order to hold bargaining power in the household and marketplace.

- Laws can be an important catalyst of change in countries such as Tunisia, where women assert their right to vote and to abort, and where they fight against sharia law, which is perceived as a means of oppression.
- Women from the global south often fill the low-paid, precarious, part-time jobs and are exploited. In this manner, feminism is often used to protect classist ideals.
- Paid parental leave allows for more female participation in the labor force, and changes gender norms about who should participate in child care.
- A better procurement system would be an effective tool for change. Less than 1% of current World Bank procurement is from women-owned firms and we need to increase that ratio as well as the number of women-owned firms.
- We need to bring an intersectional approach to our conception of equality, including the collection of statistics and surveys on intersectionality.
- Indirect discrimination: stereotypes are part of a vicious cycle (for example, if women are said to be not as good at a particular field, fewer women will enter in it).

Best practices evoked regarding public policies, corporate actions, civil society or academic initiatives:

- Have laws that fine companies and institutions that do not properly implement policies to increase gender equality.
- Have corporate gender quotas, where women are retained and advanced to higher levels.
- Increase cooperation and funding for training law enforcement to recognize a broader definition of gender-based violence.
- Have laws to address the wage gap, in which employees and unions negotiate salaries on a yearly basis with fines for companies who do not enforce these laws.
- Encourage those who have experienced discrimination to report this discrimination and assert their rights.
- Abolish legal economic discrimination, such as the law in France that says women cannot have jobs that cause them to carry weight heavier than 35 lbs.
- Establish paid paternal leave, because when men have the ability to take leave, it helps to increase female labor force participation and works to shift gender norms.
- Include women from the global south in feminist movements and support them in their attempt to get out of exclusively low-paid, precarious work.
- Improve the process for filing class action/reporting discrimination and violence.
- Making efforts to procure from women-owned firms.