Report on the Intersectionality Workshop for International Women's Day

Date: 9th March 2024
Venue: Amonoo-Neizer Conference Centre, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana
Time: 9:00 am
Facilitator: Ms. Lolynda Kekeli Adonu

Introduction

On March 9, 2024, an Intersectionality Workshop took place at KNUST as part of International Women's Day (IWD) celebrations, organized in conjunction with the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) Ghana Chapter. Led by Ms. Lolynda Kekeli Adonu, a social scientist renowned for her work on gender equality and social inclusion, the workshop attracted 90 women from diverse academic institutions across Ghana. Participants included representatives from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), University of Ghana (UG), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University for Development Studies (UDS), University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), and Sunyani Technical University. Participants were women scientists with various STEM research backgrounds.

This report details the workshop's objectives, activities, and discussions on intersectionality, highlighting its impact on participants and recommendations for advancing diversity and inclusion in STEM. This activity was supported by a Diversity in Science Grant from the Biochemical Society.

Objectives of the Workshop

The Intersectionality Workshop aimed to:

1. **Promote Awareness of Intersectionality**: Foster understanding of intersectionality and its impact on diversity and inclusion, especially within scientific and academic settings.

2. **Encourage Self-Reflection and Identity Exploration**: Guide participants in exploring their identities, privileges, and challenges from an intersectional perspective.

3. **Support Inclusion Efforts for Women in STEM**: Discuss strategies for increasing the representation of women in scientific fields.

4. **Build a Supportive Network**: Facilitate connections among women from diverse backgrounds to share insights, foster solidarity, and support ongoing advocacy for gender equity.

Workshop Activities

Interactive Session on Intersectionality

Ms. Adonu opened the session by posing a reflective question to attendees: *"How do we work on inclusion to help ladies who want to be scientists get to sit in the same rooms we sit?"* This initiated a powerful exploration of how academic and professional spaces can be more inclusive, particularly for women from marginalized groups. Through a game-based activity, participants engaged with different concepts related to intersectionality, examining how various aspects of identity—such as age, race, body size, and mental health status—intersect to create unique experiences of privilege and discrimination. This interactive approach encouraged open discussions and fostered a deeper understanding of intersectionality as it pertains to participants' personal and professional lives.

Insights on the Evolution of Gender Theory and Social Inclusion

Ms. Adonu presented a historical overview of gender theory, tracing its evolution and highlighting its relevance to the current gender equality and social inclusion efforts. She explained that understanding the broader context of gender theory helps reveal how intersecting identities can amplify discrimination, particularly for women in male-dominated fields like STEM. Her presentation prompted participants to consider how social identities can either hinder or facilitate access to educational and career opportunities.

Open Forum Discussion: Gender-Based Advantages and Challenges

In a lively open forum, participants debated the question, *"Do men find it easier in life than women?"* The discussion sparked a range of perspectives, with attendees sharing personal experiences and insights into how gender impacts opportunities and societal expectations. A consensus emerged that training, both academic and social, plays a substantial role in shaping men's and women's paths, with women often facing additional barriers due to societal stereotypes and expectations. This discussion highlighted the need for targeted support for women in academic and professional settings to overcome structural and cultural biases.

Strategies for Working with Marginalized Groups

Ms. Adonu emphasized the importance of self-awareness in working effectively with marginalized communities. She advised participants to assess their own identities and understand how their privileges or challenges shape their interactions with others. This self-reflection, she argued, is a foundational step in creating inclusive spaces where all voices are valued. Ms. Adonu also underscored the importance of partnerships in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to gender equality, inclusion, and quality education, noting that collaborative efforts can amplify impact and support sustainable change.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The workshop underscored several actionable insights and recommendations for advancing intersectional approaches to inclusion within academic and professional settings:

1. **Continued Education on Intersectionality**: Raising awareness about intersectionality should be an ongoing effort in institutions. Through continuous workshops and seminars, academic communities can gain deeper insights into the unique challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities.

2. **Active Promotion of Gender Inclusivity in STEM**: Universities and research institutions should implement targeted programs, such as scholarships, mentorship initiatives, and outreach efforts, aimed at supporting women and other marginalized groups interested in STEM. These programs can provide critical resources and opportunities for women to thrive in their fields.

3. **Intersectional Perspective in Policy Development**: Institutions should consider the diversity of social identities within their policies, ensuring that the experiences and challenges of individuals with intersecting marginalized identities are addressed. Inclusive policies contribute to a supportive environment that benefits all members.

4. **Building Support Networks**: Creating structured opportunities for networking can foster a supportive community among women in STEM. Networking events, mentorship programs, and collaborative platforms are essential in providing women with the support they need to navigate academia and professional spaces.

5. **Partnering with Advocacy Organizations**: Collaborating with organizations like OWSD can enhance institutional support for marginalized groups. Partnerships can provide additional resources, expand visibility for underrepresented voices, and foster a more inclusive environment within academic and research communities.

Conclusion

The Intersectionality Workshop was a valuable opportunity for 90 women from diverse institutions across Ghana to engage in meaningful discussions on intersectionality and social inclusion. By combining theoretical insights with interactive and reflective activities, the workshop empowered participants to better understand and address the complex challenges associated with intersecting identities. We are grateful to the Biochemical Society for its support.