THE BULLETEEN

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EDITOR'S *Note*

Justice has always been an integral part of the human experience, being directly linked how we percieve the rights of one another and how autonomous we are the puruse what we desire and what is require of us by several different factors in life.

Justice, advocacy and equality in STEM comes from the same desire for freedom of self-experssion and innovation that the practises and ideas generally support in other areas.

Just like in these other areas, STEM should not be restricted by the ciscumstances by which a person is born or cannot control but by thier desire to explore the intricacies and wonder of the world under ethical and morally correct standards and rubrics.

While us as humanity are far behind in brinign equality in terms of many aspects of life, we should strive to start somehwere. The Bulleteen, therefore, brings our perpective on justice and equity through the lens of STEM and innovation.

Rhea Agrawal

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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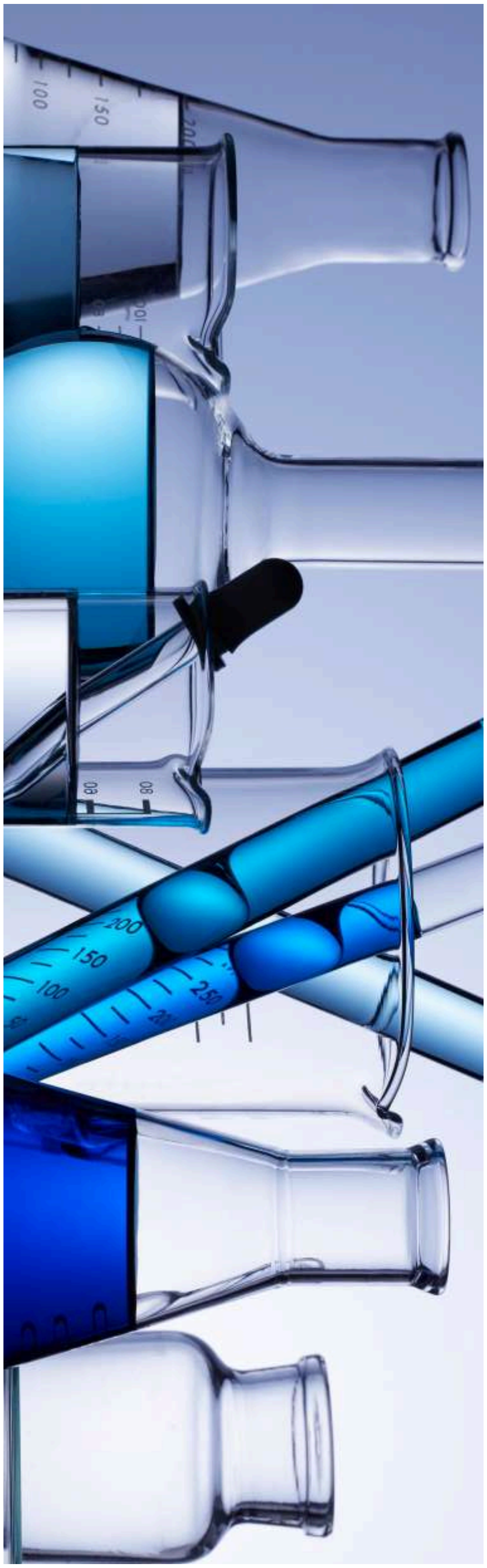

By Sneha

Despite significant strides toward gender equality in academia and the sciences, a persistent and pervasive issue remains: the unequal distribution of scientific research funding. This disparity, often referred to as a "funding gap," poses a significant challenge to the scientific community's ability to innovate and progress. While women now earn a large percentage of STEM PhDs and are entering the scientific workforce in record numbers, they continue to face systemic barriers when it comes to securing the funding necessary to advance their careers and conduct groundbreaking research. This article explores the various facets of this bias, its consequences, and the critical steps needed to achieve true gender equity in scientific funding.

Numerous studies have illuminated the gender bias in research funding. A landmark 2017 study in JAMA showed that women applying for grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were less likely to be awarded funding compared to their male counterparts, even after controlling for factors like research productivity and experience. Similar patterns have been observed across different disciplines and funding agencies globally. For instance, a 2019 report by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that male researchers receive, on average, a larger share of grant funding than female researchers in the same fields.

The reasons behind this bias are complex and multi-faceted, ranging from explicit prejudice to unconscious bias embedded in the peer-review process. Unconscious bias plays a significant role, where reviewers, often without realizing it, may favor proposals submitted by men. This can manifest in subtle ways, such as evaluating a man's potential more favorably or questioning a woman's expertise more critically. Research published in Nature Human Behaviour in 2018 demonstrated that grant reviewers tended to score proposals differently based on the gender of the applicant, a bias that was particularly strong in the evaluation of "principal investigators" (PIs), the lead researchers on a project.

The consequences of this funding gap are far-reaching, affecting not only individual careers but the entire scientific ecosystem. For women, the lack of funding can stall or even end their research careers. Without the financial resources to hire a team, purchase equipment, or conduct experiments, a researcher's ability to produce impactful work is severely limited. This can lead to a vicious cycle where a lack of funding leads to a lower publication record, which in turn makes it even harder to secure future grants. The "leaky pipeline" of women in STEM is often attributed, in part, to this career attrition that happens at critical juncts, such as the transition from postdoctoral researcher to a tenured faculty position, where securing independent funding is a prerequisite.

Beyond individual careers, the funding gap impoverishes science as a whole. When a significant portion of the scientific talent pool is systematically underfunded, society misses out on their unique perspectives, research questions, and innovations. Diverse teams are known to be more creative and effective problem-solvers. By sidelining female researchers, the scientific community may be overlooking groundbreaking discoveries, particularly in areas like women's health, where female researchers are often at the forefront.

Addressing this deeply ingrained bias requires a multi-pronged approach that targets both the individual and systemic levels.

1. Blind Review Processes: Implementing "double-blind" review processes, where both the reviewer and the applicant's identity are hidden, can help mitigate unconscious bias. While not foolproof, this method forces reviewers to focus solely on the merit of the proposal rather than the identity of the person behind it. Some funding agencies, such as the European Research Council (ERC), have piloted this approach with promising results.

2. Diversity in Review Panels: A lack of diversity on grant review panels can perpetuate existing biases. Ensuring that review committees are composed of a diverse group of experts, including a significant number of women and individuals from various backgrounds, can introduce different perspectives and challenge prevailing assumptions. The National Science Foundation (NSF) in the U.S. has made efforts to increase the diversity of its review panels.

3. Bias Training: Mandatory unconscious bias training for all grant reviewers can raise awareness of common biases and provide strategies to counteract them. Such training is increasingly being adopted by universities and funding bodies to promote more equitable decision-making.

The gender funding gap in scientific research is a serious issue that undermines the principles of meritocracy and slows down scientific progress. It is not just a problem for women; it is a problem for science. By implementing systemic changes—from blind reviews to diversified review panels and targeted training—and fostering a culture of mentorship and sponsorship, we can begin to break down the barriers that have long held back female scientists. Only when we ensure that all researchers, regardless of gender, have an equal opportunity to secure funding will we unlock the full potential of scientific innovation and truly advance the frontiers of knowledge. The future of science depends on our ability to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

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DATA FOR JUSTICE

Using AI and Environmental Science to Address Climate Inequality

By Sneha

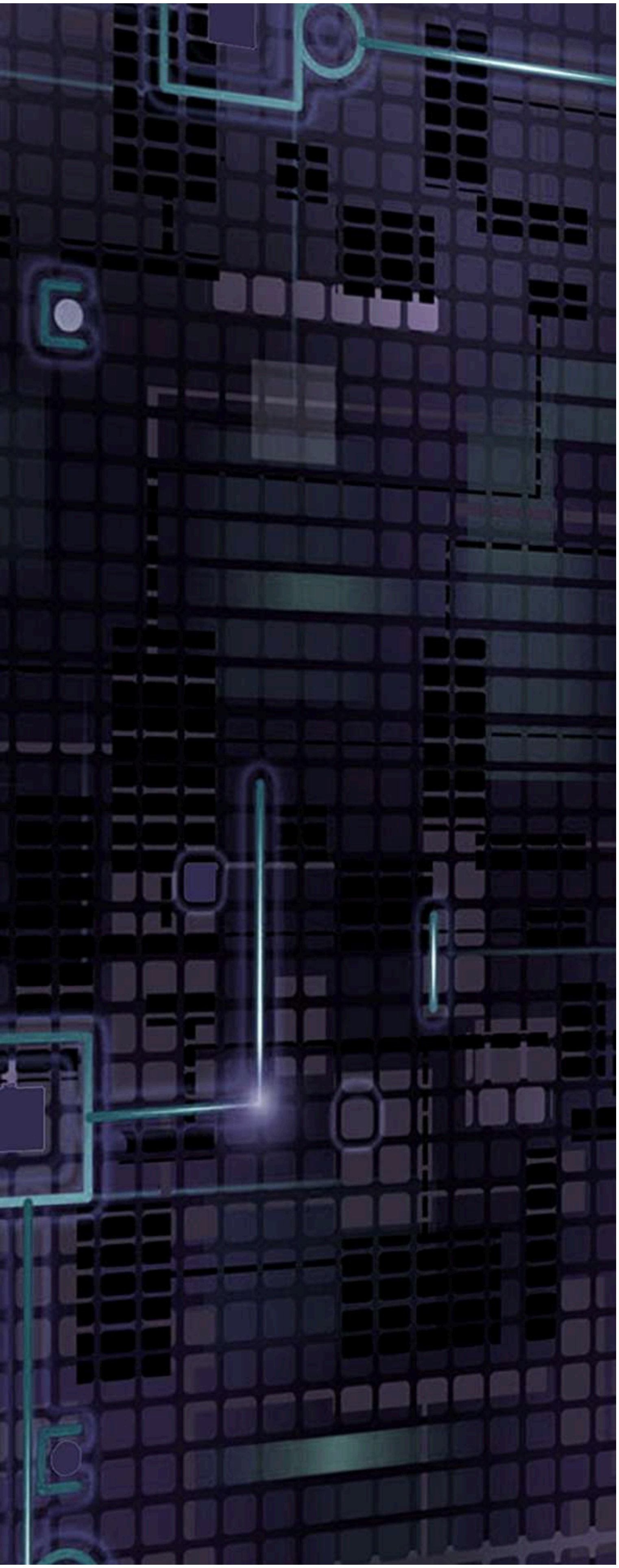
The climate crisis is not just an environmental issue; it is a profound matter of social and economic justice. While its effects are global, they are disproportionately felt by the world's most vulnerable populations—often those who have contributed the least to the problem. From small island nations facing rising sea levels to marginalized communities suffering from extreme heat events and pollution, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities. However, a new frontier in the fight for climate justice is emerging, one that leverages the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced environmental science to create a more equitable future.

For decades, climate modeling has been a complex endeavor, relying on supercomputers to simulate global systems. While powerful, these traditional models can lack the granular detail needed to understand how climate change impacts specific, local communities. This is where AI and machine learning are proving transformative. By processing vast datasets from satellites, ground sensors, and social surveys, AI algorithms can create high-resolution maps of climate vulnerability. These maps can pinpoint areas most susceptible to flooding, drought, or heatwaves, allowing for more targeted and efficient allocation of resources. This analysis empowers governments and non-profits to build more resilient infrastructure and develop proactive disaster response plans, shifting from reactive relief to preventative action.

AI-driven environmental science is also revolutionizing how we monitor pollution. Drones equipped with AI can autonomously survey industrial sites to identify methane leaks, a potent greenhouse gas. Satellite imagery, analyzed by AI, can track deforestation in real-time and monitor urban air quality at the street level. This data provides the evidence needed to hold polluters accountable and enforce environmental regulations, which have historically been weak or unenforced in low-income areas.

Beyond data collection, AI can be a powerful tool for a just transition to a low-carbon economy. For example, in the energy sector, AI can optimize the integration of renewable sources like solar and wind power into existing electrical grids. This grid optimization can reduce energy waste and improve stability, making clean energy more accessible and affordable for communities that have traditionally relied on fossil fuels. In agriculture, AI-powered systems can provide farmers with precise data on irrigation and soil health, leading to more efficient water usage and higher crop yields, a critical concern for regions facing water scarcity.

However, the application of these technologies is not without its own risks of perpetuating inequality. The digital divide is a significant barrier, as communities without access to reliable internet or digital infrastructure cannot benefit from these tools.



Furthermore, if the AI models are trained on biased data, they can inadvertently reinforce existing social inequities. For example, if a model for predicting flood risk is trained on data from affluent areas, it may fail to accurately assess the risk for informal settlements with different construction types and land use.

To truly harness the power of data for justice, we must prioritise a few key actions. First, there needs to be a conscious effort to build and deploy AI systems with an equity-by-design approach, ensuring that models are trained on diverse and representative datasets. Second, initiatives must be put in place to close the digital divide and provide communities with the training and resources needed to use these technologies. This includes fostering local expertise and capacity building to ensure that solutions are co-created with, not just for, the affected populations.

By coupling the analytical power of AI with the foundational principles of environmental science, we can create a powerful engine for change. It offers a path to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to climate action and instead provides tailored, data-driven solutions that address the specific vulnerabilities of those on the front lines of the climate crisis. This is how we can ensure that our pursuit of a sustainable future is also a pursuit of justice.

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BREAKING BARRIERS

Supporting Neurodivergent Individuals in STEM

By Tiya

STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—are often praised as hubs of innovation and discovery. Yet for neurodivergent individuals, these spaces can feel less like a playground for curiosity and more like a labyrinth of barriers. Despite their unique strengths, including exceptional problem-solving abilities and creative pattern recognition, neurodivergent people remain underrepresented in STEM. The reasons for this are not rooted in a lack of ability, but in systemic, social, and structural barriers that create an uneven playing field.

For many neurodivergent students, STEM classrooms and labs can be overwhelming environments. Bright fluorescent lights, loud equipment, and crowded labs trigger sensory overload, making it difficult to focus or participate fully. Such overstimulation is not a minor inconvenience—it can significantly hinder learning and contribute to heightened stress. On top of this, traditional teaching methods, which often rely on linear, lecture-based delivery, may not match the diverse ways neurodivergent minds process information. Students who think visually, kinesthetically, or nonlinearly are left struggling to adapt to rigid structures rather than being encouraged to thrive through their strengths. The problem is worsened by a lack of accommodations. When schools fail to provide alternatives—quiet study spaces, flexible assessments, or tailored instructional strategies—neurodivergent students are essentially told they must conform or be left behind.

Beyond the classroom setup, social expectations in STEM can pose equally difficult hurdles. Group projects, while intended to teach collaboration, often become sources of frustration for neurodivergent students. Miscommunication, uneven workload distribution, and difficulties in navigating group dynamics can result in exclusion or misunderstandings. Even when neurodivergent individuals express themselves authentically, peers and educators may misinterpret behaviors due to stigma or lack of awareness. The result is a culture where students often feel pressured to mask their traits—suppressing natural communication styles or hiding sensory needs—just to avoid being judged. This silencing not only drains energy but also prevents authentic contributions from emerging in collaborative work.

The difficulties extend far beyond classrooms. In professional contexts, neurodivergent individuals face systemic challenges embedded within the culture of STEM itself. Hiring practices, for instance, often rely on standardized interview formats that prioritize quick verbal responses or abstract hypothetical reasoning. Such approaches can disadvantage candidates whose strengths lie in deep logical analysis or unconventional problem-solving styles. The lack of training among interviewers on neurodiversity further compounds this problem, leading to hiring processes that unintentionally exclude highly capable individuals. Additionally, the broader culture in STEM frequently pressures neurodivergent professionals to conform to neurotypical norms, demanding constant self-monitoring. This expectation creates a cognitive and emotional load that can contribute to burnout. Without strong institutional support—mentorship, accessible policies, or awareness initiatives—neurodivergent individuals are left to navigate careers without the resources they deserve.

The cost of these barriers is profound. The constant effort to mask, adapt, and endure unsupportive environments often leads to serious mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and exhaustion. Burnout becomes a near-constant companion. More broadly, these systemic obstacles contribute to the underrepresentation of neurodivergent individuals in STEM. This underrepresentation not only limits opportunities for talented individuals but also deprives the field of diverse perspectives that could fuel innovation.

Creating inclusive STEM environments is not just a matter of fairness; it is a matter of progress. By addressing sensory needs, adopting flexible teaching strategies, fostering supportive social dynamics, and rethinking systemic structures like interviews and workplace policies, institutions can unlock the full potential of neurodivergent individuals. Their contributions have the power to reshape STEM, but only if given the chance to thrive authentically.

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INCLUSIVE STEM EDUCATION
for Students with Disabilities

By Joleen

STEM promises discovery and solutions, but for many students with disabilities it remains a field full of avoidable obstacles. Inclusion is not lowering standards. It is designing classrooms, labs, and learning tools so everyone can participate and excel.

Barriers come in three main forms. Physical barriers include benches that are too high, narrow aisles, or equipment that is difficult to manipulate. Digital barriers appear when course materials and lab software are incompatible with screen readers or other assistive technologies. Attitudinal barriers arise when educators assume students with disabilities cannot handle advanced work, which can discourage talent before it develops (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).

U.S. law guarantees rights, but meeting legal minimums is not the same as enabling participation. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires access in public life and the Department of Justice updated web accessibility rules in 2024 to push digital inclusion (U.S. Department of Justice, 2024). IDEA provides rights and services for school-aged children, but institutions often stop at compliance instead of redesigning learning and lab environments for full access (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).

Universal Design for Learning gives a clear, research-based framework. UDL asks teachers to present material in multiple ways, allow multiple means of expression, and offer multiple means of engagement so learners with different needs can succeed (CAST, 2024). Programmatic support matters too. AccessSTEM at the University of Washington pairs students with mentors, internships, and lab adaptations and reports strong outcomes for participants who receive sustained support (DO-IT AccessSTEM, 2024).

Sonification is one example that expands participation. Converting data to sound allows researchers with visual impairments to hear patterns and perform analysis. Recent open-access work on sonification shows both practical research uses and inclusive benefits, and it documents tools that bring auditory analysis into mainstream research workflows (Casado, Díaz-Merced, & García, 2024; UNOOSA, 2023). Scientists such as Wanda Díaz-Merced have demonstrated that sonification enables high-quality astronomical analysis while widening participation.

Inclusive STEM is not optional. Schools must design spaces and curricula with accessibility in mind, adopt UDL principles, and invest in mentoring and adaptive tools. Policymakers must push for usable digital resources and fund proven programs. When education removes barriers, students with disabilities will contribute fully, and STEM becomes stronger for everyone.

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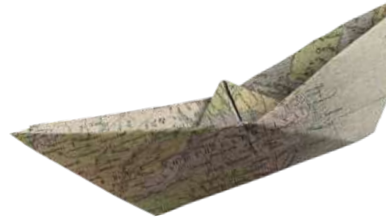
REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES *in STEM Media*



By Joleen

The media shapes who we think belongs in science, technology, engineering, and math. When TV, film, and online content present a narrow picture of scientists, the message is plain: this field is not for everyone. Representation matters because it changes what people can imagine for themselves.

Progress has been slow and uneven. A recent Geena Davis Institute analysis of film and television from 2007 to 2022 found that women made up roughly 37 percent of on-screen STEM characters in 2007–2017 and only about 38 percent in 2018–2022, so overall change has been small (Geena Davis Institute, 2024). Representation of people of color in STEM roles rose more substantially in recent years, yet leadership roles and characters with central narrative power remain dominated by white men (Geena Davis Institute, 2024).

Representation affects career paths. The Geena Davis Institute's study of the so called Scully Effect found that women who were familiar with Dana Scully from The X-Files were more likely to report increased interest in STEM, and many said Scully boosted their confidence to enter male-dominated fields (Geena Davis Institute, 2018). When young people see characters who look like them leading experiments, designing tools, and solving problems, they are more likely to picture themselves doing the same.

Some projects demonstrate how to do representation well. The children's show Ada Twist, Scientist puts a curious Black girl at the center of inquiry, modeling scientific curiosity for young viewers (Geena Davis Institute, 2024). Public storytelling about real figures also helps; NASA's materials that follow the Hidden Figures legacy put African American women mathematicians center stage and show how representation can correct both history and imagination (NASA, 2023). Online science communicators who reflect diverse identities and explain real science, such as Raven the Science Maven, make STEM feel relevant and accessible to broader audiences (Raven Baxter, 2020).

Tokenism and stereotypes remain a problem. Diverse characters are too often included only for optics, without depth or leadership. Women may be shown as socially awkward and people of color relegated to assistant roles. Those portrayals narrow what audiences think a scientist looks like.

Writers and producers can improve representation by consulting scientists from a range of backgrounds, making technical expertise central to character arcs, and avoiding one-dimensional roles. Authentic portrayals make stories better and expand who feels welcome in STEM.

Representation in STEM media is not cosmetic. It affects who sees themselves in labs and classrooms tomorrow. The evidence is clear: better, deeper, and more visible representation helps widen the pipeline into STEM. Media makers have the power to change the culture by telling stories that show STEM is for everyone.

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WOMEN IN STEAM-H

From Advocacy to Action

By Sanvi

The underrepresentation of women in STEAM-H continues to raise questions of justice and equality. According to UNESCO, women make up less than 30% of researchers worldwide, with particularly low participation in computer science and engineering (UNESCO). This gender gap not only reflects inequality but also diminishes the diversity of perspectives essential for meaningful innovation. A lack of representation in areas such as artificial intelligence, biomedical research, and nuclear engineering means that the products and discoveries shaping the future are often built without fully considering the needs and insights of half the population.

Awareness campaigns and advocacy programs have made progress by encouraging women to pursue STEAM-H education and careers. Initiatives such as the “Girls Who Code” program and the UN’s “Women in Science” day have inspired many young women to enter these fields. However, awareness alone cannot eliminate systemic barriers. Workplace bias, unequal pay, and limited advancement opportunities remain central obstacles. For instance, the 2023 lawsuit against Google revealed pay disparities where women engineers were compensated less than their male colleagues for equivalent work (Elias). Similarly, research shows that women in STEM fields are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions even when they have comparable credentials (National Academies).

Action requires institutional responsibility. Universities must address bias in admissions and faculty hiring by implementing blind review systems and targeted outreach programs. For example, MIT increased female faculty hires in engineering by nearly 20% after adopting deliberate diversity recruitment strategies (MIT News).

However, such measures often falter if they are not accompanied by mentorship and retention policies; many women hired still leave academia due to hostile work cultures. Workplaces must adopt transparent systems for pay and promotion, such as annual equity audits, and ensure strong protection against discrimination. Companies like Salesforce have conducted company-wide pay audits and spent millions correcting inequities, yet gender gaps persist, showing that audits alone cannot fix deeper cultural biases (Sullivan).

Education systems must also challenge stereotypes and provide strong female role models. Studies show that girls' interest in STEM drops sharply during middle school, influenced by cultural expectations and a lack of representation in textbooks and classrooms (Cheryan et al.). Programs like India's Vigyan Jyoti, which encourage high school girls to pursue STEM through scholarships and mentoring, represent steps forward, though evaluations highlight that local cultural resistance still limits impact. Collecting data on recruitment and retention is essential to monitor progress and accountability, but this must move beyond symbolic reporting. Some institutions release gender equity reports annually but fail to act on the findings, creating visibility without change.
The goal is substantive equality rather than symbolic representation. True equality in STEAM-H means women having equal access, recognition, and opportunity to contribute and lead. Moving from advocacy to action ensures that justice is not limited to discourse but is applied in practice. Only through systemic reform, beyond campaigns and rhetoric, can women's participation in STEAM-H reach levels that reflect both fairness and the needs of global innovation.

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POLICY PLAYS

Data Collection & How It Affects Policies and Systemic Inequalities

By Aamnah Younus

Looking back from a hundred years ago, it's not unexpected to see changes in the system around us. Now whether this change is good or not is the question. Often, we are quick to assume that the inequalities present in the society those hundred of years ago have been abolished, although untrue. Inequality is carried out in forms different from the past yet are just as harmful.

To understand why systemic inequality is bad, it is important to first learn what the term systematic inequality means. Systemic inequality refers to the entrenched patterns of disadvantage and privilege that exist within social, economic, and political systems. These inequalities are often perpetuated through institutions, policies, and practices that create barriers for certain groups while providing advantages for others, influencing access to resources, opportunities, and overall quality of life. They enable the general crowd to oppress the minorities since authoritative figures have allowed them to do so.

Usually when an issue arises and is deemed important to make into a policy, multiple stages take place before the policy is implemented. One of those stages is data collection. During this part, data relevant to the policy is collected through multiple sources i.e government official reports, data analysts and international organisations. Although the process is performed meticulously, it is also important to note the little faults either in ignorance or lack of representation which add up into a big issue, affecting the minorities who are mostly affected through policies.

It is important to note that chances of eliminating bias fully is next to none, hence everything contains bias, just some more than the other. Bias is colloquially defined as any tendency that limits impartial consideration of a question or issue. In academic research, bias refers to a type of systematic error that can distort measurements and/or affect investigations and their results. Analysts when collecting data often focus on data aligning with their beliefs rather than one that is true. It is often noted researchers interpret results according to the stereotype that they have created. Selection bias is another term one stumbles upon when discussing data collection bias. An excellent example of this is the case of Guatemalan state terror. Upon investigation of three reports, the results were shockingly different for all of them. Similarly, when data is collected for policy making, it differs from the actual reality affecting its impact on people.

One example of how data bias affects policies is seen in environmental policies. When climate policies are issued, they dismiss the experiences of communities which have been experiencing climate change. Not only does this affect the impact of the policy but also loses the trust of the vulnerable population who feel excluded from such situations. Once institutions and governmental organisations push such flawed policies oppressing marginalised communities, the local people without authority normalise such behaviour towards the communities. This pushes stereotypes and stigmas towards the oppressed and makes their daily lives miserable as they face inequalities in schools, hospitals and workplaces.

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