

## **Empowerment of Women Scientists through Women Scientist Organizations**

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The status of women's empowerment and leadership in Korea is among the worst in the world. Women scientists in executive positions and other positions influential at national level are still rare. Women make up less than 10% of middle management positions. This is mainly due to the attitude that household work is thought to be the woman's responsibility, in a culture that requires single-minded dedication to one's career in order to advance to those levels. It is crucial to educate and empower women scientists for Korea to achieve sustainable economic development.

Women have equal opportunity for education up to the PhD level in all fields. In 2013 74.5% of girls entered college compared to 67.4% of boys, however there are much fewer women in engineering fields. In natural science women occupied 53.7%, 51.2%, and 36.7% of BS, MS, and PhD degrees in 2013. However, women occupy only 18.9%, 18.6%, and 10.4% of BS, MS, and PhD degrees in engineering.

Although gender equality policies have been in effect for 15 years, there is huge disparity in the process of hiring. Women are much less likely to be hired as regular full time employees, and many end up in non-regular contract positions which pay much less, or work part time. Women have much less chance to cultivate themselves to become leaders during the course of their careers, both at work as well as in the academic/professional societies.

The Korea Federation of Women's Science and Technology Associations (KOFWST) was inaugurated in 2003 with 4 member associations, and has grown to 52 member associations spanning the full spectrum of science and engineering fields from basic science to industry, with over 60,000 women scientists, engineers and technologists as members. Since its establishment KOFWST served as a platform for women scientists to practice and to cultivate their leadership. The executive committees of KOFWST and the member associations have provided them with opportunities to learn how to run their associations, and how to organize conferences, forums and workshops. Through these activities women scientists have become much more visible as potential leaders. In addition, networking through various activities provided by KOFWST has helped members to learn from others and exchange valuable information.

Since 2005 many women scientists have been appointed in leadership positions including cabinet ministers, members of congress, and CEOs. Although the number of women scientists in the top leader positions is still far from satisfactory, there is no doubt that we will see many more of them in the near future. KOFWST will continuously serve as the platform for women to network and cultivate their leadership.