

From women's eyes at CECAM

✍ F. Baletto 📅 29-03-2022 🔗 <http://www.primapagina.sif.it/article/1482>

Since 2015, the 11th of February is the International Day of Women and Girls in Science proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly. The motivation resides in the willingness *"to achieve a full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls"*. The Centre Européen de Calcul Atomique et Moléculaire (CECAM) - a European organisation promoting fundamental research on advanced computational methods - organised a special event, "From women's eyes".

The event was a friendly and informal conversation with four excellent computational scientists, wives and mothers. Ruth Lynden-Bell (University of Cambridge), Giulia Galli (University of Chicago), Clemence Corminbeuf (EPF-Lausanne), and Magali Benoit (CNRS) shared their own experience interviewed by Sara Bonella (CECAM deputy director). Overall, their experience, which spanned over the last 60 years and different countries, provides a reference point for girls and women in STEM. Head of departments, universities, schools, and ministers are strongly encouraged to listen to the recorded event.

Beyond all my scepticism, we should remark how much we need those events. Hearing the personal stories of successful women is inspiring, and from their direct experience, we can tune changes together. We listened to the support received, the barriers overcome, the need to cry to keep going, the weird comments received. We listened to all those "innocent" comments - of various entities - a girl then a woman gets from being a student willing to study a STEM subject, do a PhD, run for a fellowship. Consciously or not, those comments might shade doubts on the quality of our work. We fight to show this is not true, but it is unfair competition. Here is the big challenge and the change we need to ask for. Our male colleagues, and generally the system, must change their attitude, not the female workers. *"Men have been privileged so long that equality feels like oppression. This needs to be conveyed to men"*, a young, well-educated male researcher wrote in the chat.

Unfortunately, someone still doubts the immense advantages diversity brings into any sector. Stop, think, and get the importance of diversity to the core of any educational system. If it helps, CECAM collaborates with a comic entitled "Cherchez, les femmes!" to promote female participation in STEM. Anyone can freely download the comic book for its widespread use, and an Italian version will be available soon.

There is another point I am keen to share. I was sincerely impressed by Ruth Lynden-Bell's experience. She was the first and the only female at Caltech, Sussex, and Cambridge. Being a unique case, Ruth and her husband were offered positions simultaneously in the same place. I am sensitive to that issue. My personal "4-body problem" - both parents are STEM-researchers split over the EU - was mentioned as a case. We should encourage EU and national entities to consider positions to keep families together, with the husband following the wife and vice versa. Such a possibility will help young female scientists not feel pressured to choose between family and science careers.



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