

# TechWomen Mentors Stress the Importance of Women in STEM Development

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*TechWomen mentors from Silicon Valley, California, United States, have emphasised the significance of women in the growth of careers in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).*

An Initiative of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, TechWomen empowers, connects and supports the next generation of women leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics from Africa, Central and South Asia, and the Middle East by providing them the access and opportunity needed to advance their careers, pursue their dreams, and inspire women and girls in their communities.



Members of TechWomen Mentors, presenting a certificate to Director, International Office and Linkages, Dr Ada Peter

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Mentoring young women on Tuesday, March 20, 2018, at Covenant University, where they hosted a professional development workshop with the topic, 'The Future of STEM: Why Women Belong Here!' some of the TechWomen mentors spoke about their personal and professional challenges and accomplishments as women in STEM.

Addressing the issue of whether women belong in STEM, Ms. Saura Naim, Senior Director of Enterprise Business Operations at Juniper Networks, said that women are needed in leadership because they are good at collaborating and delivering results. A lot of business elements, she noted, make a technical company work. "I work at a \$5million company. We are a networking company, and we ensure the company meets its strategic objectives," she said.

Naim added that men can support women by speaking up and enabling equality, and this is important because "together we achieve success".

The Head of Global Diversity and Inclusion at Mozilla, Ms. Larissa Shapiro, who made a presentation on 'Building Your Personal Brand', told the participants that diversity provides rich and well-articulated thought in a team; different kinds of thinkers solve different problems; empathetic people solve end user problems; and one's value is both in the quality of her work and in the perspective that she belongs.

Dwelling on the issue of why women belong in STEM, Dr. Jeannice Fairrer Samani, who is a technologist, academic and serial entrepreneur, shared with the audience what it means to have allies. According to her, it is important for men and women to come together to build new technology; have diversity on the table so that the best can be selected; have a relational interchange, and have somebody to champion one through the next assignment.

The participants, featuring students of Covenant University and the University of Lagos, including pupils from different secondary schools, were subsequently grouped into three for breakout sessions, during which the TechWomen mentors spoke on various topics.

Prior to the commencement of the workshop, the Management of Covenant University hosted the 16-member delegation of senior women technology executives from Silicon Valley to a luncheon reception, where there was a brief interaction.

The Registrar, Covenant University, Dr. Olumuyiwa Oludayo, had in his introductory remarks said that the University currently drives the vision of becoming one of the top 10 universities in the world and is very close to the vision already. He explained that the University, which has about 204 women faculty, with 103 of them in the fields of science and engineering, sees a partnership with TechWomen as something that could help the institution drive its vision.

Responding, the Lead, TechWomen at Institute of International Education, San Francisco, Ms. Jillian Scot, who led the delegation, thanked the Covenant Management for giving her team the opportunity to explore the University and meet with the students. She said that TechWomem mentors strengthens participants' professional capacity, increase mutual understanding between key networks of professionals, and expand girls' interest in STEM careers by exposing them to female role models.

In his remarks, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Shalom Chinedu, representing the Vice-Chancellor, Covenant University, Professor AAA. Atayero, said that the University was highly delighted to host the TechWomen delegation. He noted that the Covenant is gradually migrating from teaching to a research University, adding that collaborating with TechWomen could help the institution meet her targets.

Other members of the TechWomen delegation included Ms. Elizabeth Deng, a Senior Software Engineer at Twitter; Ms. Heather Frank, a Marketing Recruiter at LinkedIn; Ms. Jessica Dickinson Goodman, Outreach Coordinator, Child Advocates of Silicon Valley; Professor Leedjia Svec, an avid STEM and diversity advocate; Ms. Maile Smith, a Principal Geologist at Northgate Environmental Management Inc.; Ms. Pamela O'Leary, a diversity and inclusion expert; Ms. Queen Denchukwu, a Technical University Recruiter at Autodesk; and Ms. Zoe Schladow, a Lead Designer on the product innovation team at Netflix.

Also representing Covenant University at the gathering was the Dean, College of Science and Technology, Professor Kolawole Ajanaku; Dean College of Business and Social Sciences, Professor Philip Alege; Director, International Office and Linkages, Dr. Ada Peter, and a host of faculty members.

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