

Vision Statement
María Alejandra Rodríguez Hertz

My name is María Alejandra Rodríguez Hertz. I was born in Rosario, Argentina in 1970. I did my undergraduate studies at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, where I got a BSc. in 1994. I moved then to Montevideo, Uruguay, where I started my graduate studies at the Universidad de la República. While pursuing my graduate studies, I spent a year studying at IMPA, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I obtained a PhD in Mathematics in Uruguay in 1999.

All my scientific production has been developed in Uruguay. I am so far the only female Full Professor in Mathematics in my country. As part of my scientific activities, I have visited many international research centers. In particular, I have had the opportunity to give courses in developing countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Libya and China, and to learn about the different challenges that women in science in developing countries face.

One of my concerns is Education and, as part of my activism in this area, I have contact with many of the main actors in my country, including ministers, policy makers, senators, representatives, union leaders. I also have experience in the media, particularly in radio, where I have been a guest speaker on a weekly show since 2014. I also regularly appear on television and in the newspapers.

As a woman in science in Latin America, I am well aware of the specific issues that women in science face in developing countries. One of the problems we have is lack of visibility. This issue has important consequences, often economic. Women in science are invisible not only in society, but also in academia. This means women have little access to decision-making positions, to prizes, to promotions. As an example of this, in our research center, the promotion system has rarely benefited women, since each time someone has to nominate the candidate to be promoted, and it was very rare that anyone considered a woman. We changed this system a few years ago, so that any candidate can apply for promotion, and his/her application must be considered by a committee. This single measure has substantially improved women's position. There is, however, a serious problem of self-confidence when it comes to applying for the highest positions, and this issue has still to be addressed.

An activity that I find useful for OWSD to undertake is organizing local edit-a-thons of Wikipedia, in order to improve the visibility of women in science in each of our countries. Another thing that is important is the local organization of groups such as Women in Math which help to mentor young students and improve the social bonds of women in the academic community. I think that in developing countries we are less organized as a lobbying group. We have trouble getting the same degree of organization as similar groups which exist in the developed countries, but these groups are important in order to get things done. Having a lobbying group gives a context for raising issues to institutions and governments that otherwise would die due to lack of force.

Another problem that women face in academia across the world, but particularly in Latin America, is their vulnerability. Not being able to access decision-making positions, they are many times in a weak position and cannot challenge sexual harassment, which is regrettably a very frequent phenomenon. Often a woman will be evaluated by the very person who has harassed her, and she has no defense. It is very common that society takes the side of the attacker. This has grave consequences for the woman's chances of promotion, and sometimes even leads to her resignation or the abandonment of her career.

This is a very delicate issue, but it would be good if OWSD could lead a social study of this phenomenon, in order to have concrete statistics. A study with concrete numbers would help to raise awareness in the media, and possibly to encourage women to ask for help. Local organizations such as Women in Science could provide support and counselling for the specific situation of women in academia.

Another very important issue is encouraging girls at an early stage (primary and secondary schools) to enjoy science. Many teachers are biased in their treatment of girls, imagining that they are not suited to science. Even though this is a worldwide phenomenon, it is particularly strong in the developing countries.

A suggested activity is working with teachers, and even visiting schools so that girls can learn from our activities.

I am an activist in my country of the role of women in science, and have had a broadcasting program (Jana and her sisters) in one of the main radio stations in my country (El Espectador) in order to get our women in science known to the wide public. Many of the above mentioned issues were treated in that program. Also, I started the organization of Women in Math in my university, which is still at a settling stage.

There are many other lines of action to address. I just chose these in order to focus, and I hope to have an opportunity to make a difference in them.