

IANAS Science Education Workshop and Teachers Day
Launch of IANAS Women for Science Working Group
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
June 11-14, 2010

IANAS, The InterAmerican Network of Academies of Science, recently founded a Women for Science Working Group (WfS-WG). On June 11, 2010, the six members WfS-WG met for the first time, on the day preceding the June 12-13 annual meeting of the IANAS Science Education (Sci. Ed.) Program. These events were followed by a one day conference of secondary science teachers in the public high schools in the Rio area.

The members of WfS-WG are Anneke Levelt Sengers, Chair (NAS, NAE); Sophia Huyer, Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World – OWSD. ; Juan Pedro Laclette (Mexican Academy); Beatriz Barbuy (Brazilian Academy); Maria del Carmen Samayoa (Guatemalan Academy); and Patricia Taboada-Serrano (Bolivian Academy). They were joined on June 11 by Marcos Cortesao Scheuenstuhl, Executive Secretary of IANAS. They learned about the other IANAS programs, those in science education, water, energy and science capacity building, for which WfS-WG will serve as an adviser and as a source of information on gender issues. The WfS-WG then outlined an action plan, focusing on networking with the academies, with international organizations advocating for women in science, as well as between women scientists and female graduate students by means of a dedicated website. WfS-WG plans to increase the visibility of women scientists by collecting and publishing biographies of Latin American female scientists. The members outlined a draft for a proposal to IAP, the global network of science academies. A summary of the minutes of the meeting will appear on the IANAS Women for Science website which is under construction at www.ianas.org/wfswg/women_en.asp.

The WfS-WG, in addition to planning its first year of actions, helped organize a session on gender issues in science education for the Sci. Ed. Program on June 12. The speakers were Anneke Levelt Sengers, Chair, WfS-WG, and Prof. Elisa Saitovitch, a prominent materials scientist at the Brazilian Center for Research in Physics. They addressed the need for attracting and advancing women in the sciences, the obstacles encountered, and ways to make progress.

On the second day of the Sci. Ed. meeting, Sally Shuler, Director of the Smithsonian-NAS National Science Resources Center, made a strong plea for developing long-range strategic plans for IANAS and its programs. As a consequence, the proposal WfS-WG submitted to IAP for 2011 at the end of June contains a section on strategic planning in addition to the action items that WfS-WG developed prior to the Sci. Ed. meeting.

The June 14 Teacher Day was conducted in Portuguese with simultaneous translations into English and Spanish. Minister Nilcea Freire, National Secretary on Policies for Women, had expressed strong interest in the gender theme which was addressed for the first time at this meeting. She gave the key lecture and attended a good part of the meeting. WfS-WG found two female Brazilian scientists willing to address the audience

which consisted of a hundred teachers and young teachers-in-training, some of them barely out of high school themselves. These teachers had been introduced to inquiry-based science education, as advocated and developed by the IANAS Sci. Ed. Program and promulgated by the Brazilian Government. One speaker was Prof. Beatriz Barbuy, an astronomer at the University of Sao Paulo, a L'Oréal-UNESCO Award winner and member of WfS-WG; the other was Prof. Marcia Barbosa, the organizer of the first IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics in Paris in 2002, which was a groundbreaking event. At the end of a long day, Barbosa's enthusiastic performance emulating the joys of being a female physicist brought loud applause accompanied by admiring whistling.

Leveld Sengers stayed for another few days in Brazil, in order to write the proposal for IAP. She had not included the 2010 World Cup in her planning. On the afternoon of June 14, all of Rio, including the Brazilian Academy, closed down so Brazilians could watch the Brazil-North Korea soccer match on TV. Leveld Sengers, working in her hotel in Casablanca, noted the crowds on the beach. She and Shuler walked over to a gigantic screen, erected close by. Thousands upon thousands of young Brazilians (one sees few seniors in Rio) had collected, outfitted in the yellow and green colors of their country, to watch the game, sip beer and have a good time. It was an exhilarating experience, adding to the sense of optimism and invigoration that seems to permeate Rio.

Anneke Leveld Sengers, September 10, 2010



From left to right:

Maria del Carmen Samayoa, Guatemala; Marcos Cortesao Barnsley Scheuenstuhl; Brazil, IANAS Executive Secretary; Patricia Taboada-Serrano, Bolivia; Anneke Leveld Sengers, USA; and Beatriz Barbuy, Brazil



José Lozano, Colombian Academy, second from right, founded and chaired the IANAS Science Education Program for the past seven years. To his right, in the center, is Prof. Jorge Allende, of the Chilean Academy, who developed an inquiry-based science program for K-6. The first from right is Sally Shuler, Director, NAS/Smithsonian National Sciences Resource Center.



The Science Education meeting took place in the centuries-old National Historical Museum in Rio. Left of cannon: Alice Abreu, director, ICSU Regional Office for Latin America; right of cannon: Nora Gómez, from the UNESCO Regional Chair on Women, Science and Technology in Latin America; second from right: Lilliam Álvares, WfS-WG focal point, Cuban Academy.



Rio de Janeiro's young collect on the Copacabana beach to watch the Worldcup soccer match Brazil vs. N. Korea on a supersize screen.