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- **LETTERS**

Japan's Lagging Gender Equality

Japan, although well qualified as a country that promotes scientific advancement, lags behind other developed nations in gender equality. The percentage of female professionals trained in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is at 13.8%, the lowest among developed countries (*1*). Why is Japan so slow in maximizing the potential of female scientists in STEM? Survey results (*2*, *3*) indicate that there are too few women in positions of authority who can help younger women with career enhancement. Furthermore, male scientists show an unconscious bias when evaluating their female colleagues. Finally, female scientists often avoid competition and underestimate their ability, leading to passivity when seeking leadership roles.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan initiated the program "Supporting Positive Activities for Female Researchers." The 5-year program's goal is to accelerate the numbers of female scientists and their promotion rate at 12 research universities. A midterm evaluation of the program's impact showed a substantial increase in female faculty, particularly in positions of greater responsibility in several universities (*4*, *5*). The program gives university leaders a clear path to unlocking the potential of female scientists and helps pave the way with affirmative action, reserving positions for women.

These government measures will only have a long-term effect on the ratio and roles of women in STEM fields if the academic climate and leadership changes in Japan. This challenge will require proper enforcement of regulations by deans and department leaders.

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