



## Inspiring women scientists in Honduras<sup>☆</sup>

Maria Elena Bottazzi

Associate Dean, National School of Tropical Medicine, Professor in Pediatric Tropical Medicine and Molecular Virology and Immunology and Co-director Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston Texas, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 7 October 2019

Accepted 7 October 2019

Available online 18 October 2019

As a Honduran-trained scientist in tropical medicine and microbiology and an advocate for global health, I am delighted to join the many voices and promote action towards advancing women in science and medicine<sup>1</sup> and share a personal perspective on the global health trends and scientific challenges and opportunities currently faced by Honduran women scientists. I wish to enroll the support of the global health community to encourage Honduran women in science to raise their scientific visibility through science communication, diplomacy, community engagement and scholarly activities and inspire them to be resilient and persevere in their path of leading innovative discoveries in science & technology (S&T) to tackle the global health goals.<sup>2</sup>

This is the only way Honduras will be able to reduce the over 66% of its population that lives in poverty and tackle the many neglected tropical and emerging infectious diseases that afflict the Honduran population.<sup>3</sup> At least 50% of the pre- and school-age children in Honduras will never reach economic productivity because they are, for example, plagued by intestinal parasite infections, which reduce not only their growth capacity but also their cognitive and intellectual level.

It is well known that women thrive when they are engaged in the conception or creation of new knowledge and Honduran women scientists are a perfect example. Recent data from UNESCO,<sup>4</sup> highlights that in Honduras more women obtain university degrees and academically excel in S&T disciplines with around 41.1% of female researchers working in some aspect of research & development (R&D). However, their retention rate decreases as their career advance, primarily due to challenges posed by family, cultural and social responsibilities.

Therefore, women scientists in Honduras should craft their scientific brand, raise their visibility and learn to apply transformational leadership attributes.<sup>5</sup> First, maintain *curiosity* and always

apply a critical thinking process to understand health problems and develop new knowledge leading to innovative and appropriate health solutions. Second, create a *community* or mentoring network, which through commitment, resilience and encouragement, provides support and keeps us focused and energized when facing challenges or failures. Third, *communicate*, be a science advocate and engage in publishing not exclusively in scientific journals. Educate through dialogue by broadcasting knowledge and information via radio, television and newspaper, specifically geared towards policymakers and the general public. Lastly, establish *collaborations* and build multi-disciplinary teams with gender-equal opportunities and shared leadership and responsibility.

In summary, the global health community needs to continue to train, support, invest, empower and encourage the Honduran women that are emerging as leaders in health and medicine. This will be the formula for Honduras to be transformed and reach sustainable solutions to produce the desired impact in global health.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

### References

- [1] *The lancet on advancing women in science, medicine, and global health.* Lancet 2019;393:10171 p 493-610, e6-e28.
- [2] - <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>; Accessed October 4, 2019
- [3] - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras>; Accessed October 4, 2019
- [4] <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs55-women-in-science-2019-en.pdf>; Accessed October 4, 2019
- [5] Bourke J, Dillon B. The six signature traits of inclusive leadership. Thriving in a diverse world. Deloitte Insights 2016. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/six-signature-traits-of-inclusive-leadership.html> Accessed October 4, 2019.

<sup>☆</sup> Advisory Board Member, EBioMedicine (published by The Lancet)

E-mail address: [bottazzi@bcm.edu](mailto:bottazzi@bcm.edu)