

*“ASREN is a non-profit company with limited liability (GmbH) and is officially registered in Germany, under the umbrella of the League of Arab States. The main goal is to connect Arab institutions among themselves and to the globe through high-speed data-communications networks. Such networks will enable sharing and access to a variety of R&E services and applications in addition to utilization of highly sophisticated and technologically advanced computing resources available only at very few institutions in the world.”*

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## #WomeninSTEM Campaign Wrap-Up



ASREN and AfricaConnect3 wrapped up the #WomeninSTEM Campaign on March 8th 2021, while celebrating International Women’s Day.

The campaign, that had been kicked off on February 11th 2021, aimed at celebrating women and girls in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Our #WomeninSTEM campaign included awe-inspiring stories of female colleagues working around the clock in STEM across ASREN and the African R&E community, sharing their experiences on being women in a male dominated field.

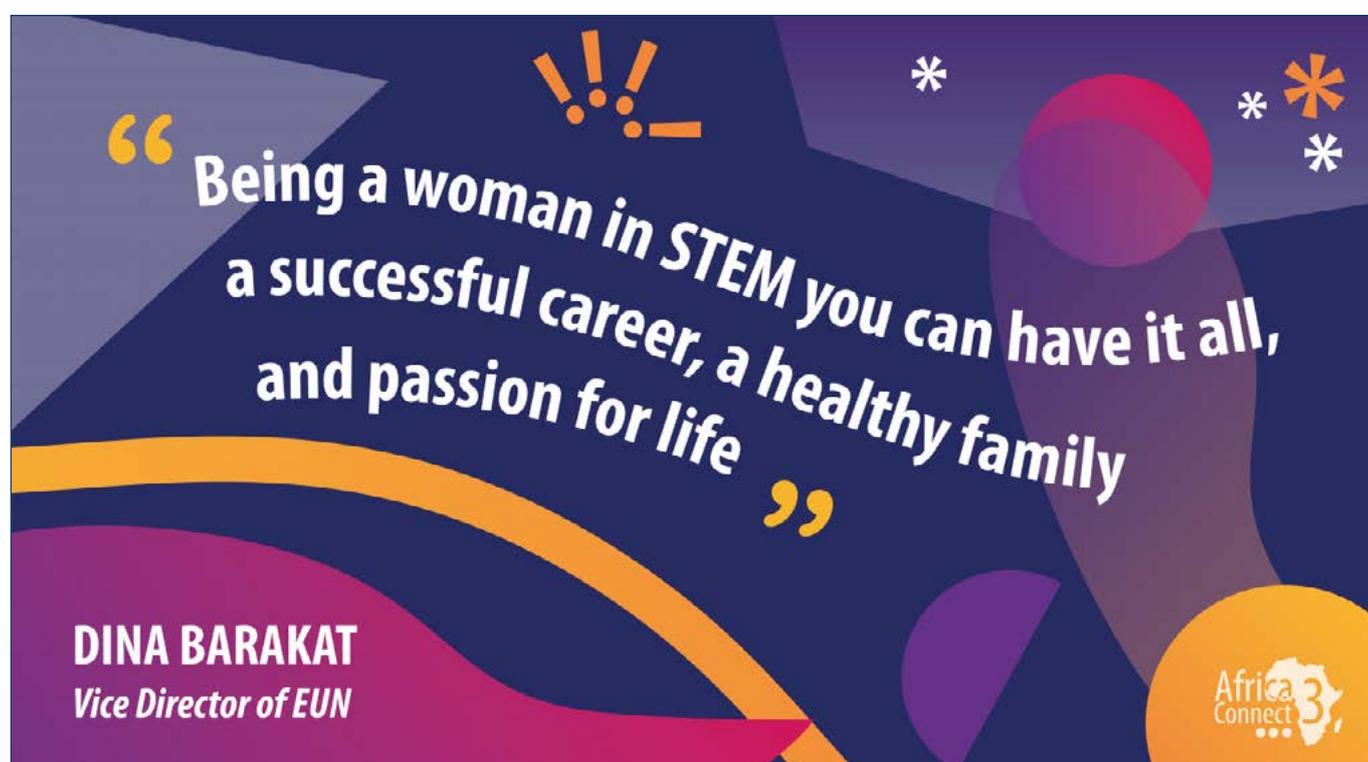
ASREN and AC3 are committed to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Thanks to all the incredible women who shared their stories with us this past month!

Check out the Women in STEM section at [AfricaConnect3 website](#).

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## Dina Barakat, EUN vice Director, on being a woman in STEM



As a part of our #womeninSTEM campaign, ASREN and AC3 met Dina Barakat, Vice Director of the Egyptian Universities Network (EUN), a member of the Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN).

Dina graduated from the Department of Communication Engineering – Cairo University in 1993, and has been working at EUN for over than 27 years. We hope that her story will inspire the current and next generations of women and girls who are interested in science.

**What drew you to Communication Engineering? Can you recall any times when you questioned your involvement in STEM because of your gender?**

*I was generally interested in the development taking place in the world of technology, especially the science of communication, and the beginning of the enormous role that constituted computer use at that time. At times, I felt that studying engineering in general and this field in particular was to some extent difficult. But I didn't see that this difficulty had any relation with being a girl. The study of engineering is a difficult science in general, whether the student is female or male.*

**In the Arab world, STEM fields (especially engineering) are stereotyped as male dominated fields, where girls face cultural discouragement from going to engineering schools, and are expected to stay home and take care of kids and family. Do you see a lot of gender stereotyping in Egypt? What do you think can be done to change this stereotype?**

*The truth is that I do not see that in Egypt. I enrolled in college in 1988, which is more than 30 years ago, and I haven't encountered this problem at that time. In general, I think that perhaps the field itself is to some extent difficult, but it is not stereotyped as male dominated fields.*

**For many women in engineering, balancing a demanding career with a family is difficult and often results in a woman leaving the profession. As a highly accomplished working mother, what are your key tips on how to balance a successful career while maintaining a healthy family life?**

*I believe that the work of women in the absolute, whatever the field and specialty of the work, helps to form a family and contributes effectively to the success of this system. The working mother appreciates the value of time and makes the best use of it, and this is directly reflected in her family and children. Everything is prepared and well organized to maintain a required achievement, including a healthy family life. I do not see at all a link between a woman's work and the failure of her family life. A successful woman in her work cannot allow failure to seep into her family life.*

*In general, women have to define their priorities for choosing a job with flexible hours from another that may require long working hours, depending on their family circumstances, the age of their children, and the different responsibilities assigned to them according to the age of their children. She always has to balance between her responsibilities.*

**Finally, what advice would you give to women who are questioning their STEM related studies/ career?**

*Determination, good time management, and optimization of all available capabilities are the keys to success in any field, including the formation of a successful family.*

## Interview with Prof. Farida Fassi at Mohammed V University, Morocco



ASREN and AC3 interviewed Farida Fassi, a Professor of Physics at Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco. Farida was awarded with the European Ph.D. in Experimental Particle Physics in recognition of her contribution in the ATLAS experiment at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Switzerland. She has been a member of the ATLAS collaboration since 1998 and the CMS collaboration since 2002, where she was responsible for leadership of several international research teams.

Prof Fassi is genuinely excited about her research topics that are centred on connecting theoretical particle physics with experimental results. This includes search for new physics phenomena that can be produced in the LHC's proton-proton collisions, motivated by the presence of dark matter in our universe. She is convinced that particle physicists share the excitement of discovery, inspiring young minds.

**What first sparked your interest in Physics and ultimately led to the career path you took?**

*When I was a little girl, my parents nurtured my curiosity and problem-solving skills through practicing home tasks such as cooking, doing household chores, planning a trip and so forth. They fostered my critical thinking by playing a crucial role in encouraging and supporting my natural*

abilities to learn science at home. Thanks to my parents, and especially to my Aunt Mariam, I have learned how to appreciate science that provides us a way of thinking and knowing the world better. I have always been fascinated by knowledge, because it can give power to human beings to know how to explore nature and harness energy, understand our environment and use them for our benefits.

My passion for mathematics started at school. I used to quickly finish my related household chores and hide in my bedroom for the rest of the day solving mathematical problems. I have a naturally inquisitive mind and the enjoyment of numerical investigation gave me the motivation to learn more. I have come to realize the importance of mathematics in everyday life, a base to so many subject areas such as physics and engineering.

My interest in physics started during my teenage years, as a curious person who tried to understand the world around us. Combining the curiosity with hard facts and a good knowledge of mathematics is the best process to build scientific knowledge. I believe that mathematics is the only legitimate approach to study physics of the infinitesimal. And then, the experimental validation of the physics mathematical models to interpret data either to confirm or to reject a hypothesis via models predictions.

**You have an impressive list of accomplishments working as a professor and researcher. Could you briefly describe your major research interests/current projects?**

I have a true passion for science and a real need to understand the building blocks of the universe, from its early stages to its current state and future evolution. I explore the properties of fundamental particles at the highest energy proton-proton collisions at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland and using the novel instrumentation of the ATLAS Experiment, dedicated high-speed electronics and real-time data processing, and cutting-edge data analysis algorithms. My research spans many areas of interest that require mastering challenges related to instrumentation (e.g. beams and detectors), data acquisition, selection and analysis, and making data and results available to the broader science communities. My main areas of interest are Top quark, Higgs Boson and Dark Matter domains, with special emphasis on exploring and deploying of new experimental techniques such as Machine Learning algorithms to help address the more difficult aspects of data analysis.

I am also involved in Grid Technologies for wide-area networks in the distributed computing, such as distributed data generation, simulation, processing, transferring and data analysis worldwide.

**After completing your Ph.D., what was your experience finding your first professional position? Did you find that being a woman either positively or negatively impacted your search in a field that was historically male dominated?**

*After being awarded the European Ph.D. in physics I did postdoctoral studies and research positions at the Spanish Research Council, the French National Centre for Scientific Research and National Center for Particle, Astroparticle and Nuclear Physics. I have always been fascinated by the people who accomplished extraordinary feats and highest value in science, primarily in particle physics. I got into the particle physics domain without worrying about the small number of women in it. I haven't experienced any prejudice and the fact that there were so few women actually inspired me, because I wanted to emphasize the importance of diversity in general – not only in terms of gender, but also ethnicity, culture and traditions.*

**You're very passionate about gender equality in STEM subjects. What is your take on why women are underrepresented in these topics? And what do you think can be done to change this?**

*We have to mitigate the shortage of women in science via promoting and encouraging careers in science. The benefits of gender balance are not just for women and girls, but to ensure the coherence of the human beings as a cornerstone of society. The promise approach to achieve gender balance in sciences is to show young people the full range of scientific professions while they're still at school. Fostering and supporting girls to consider scientific careers may help them to choose to study science disciplines.*

*It is essential to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities, regardless of gender, ethnicity or culture. This is the true meaning of equality, and having an open and welcoming environment is critical to support diversity. Role models do aide to motivate and it is worth to enhance it in both the Islamic World and Africa. Having women in positions of responsibility in scientific institutions is useful to show the younger generation that a brilliant career in science is possible for women. In the Islamic World and Africa, we have to foster diversity in all aspects -gender, ethnicity and culture. Special initiatives for encouraging girls to undertake scientific studies have to be established.*

**What inspirational message would you give young girls to inspire them to pursue STEM?**

*You are smart enough and capable enough to join any field in STEM, and you are equally as deserving to be in these fields as anybody else. Follow your curiosities and believe in yourself.*

## Time is ticking! Register now for #WACREN2021



The banner features a blue background with a network of white dots and lines. In the top left, there is a logo for the 6th Annual Conference, dated 15-19 March 2021. The main text reads 'REGISTRATION NOW OPEN' in large, bold, white and yellow letters. Below this, a blue button contains the text 'Visit [wacren2021@wacren.net](mailto:wacren2021@wacren.net) to register'. On the right side, there is a circular inset image showing a modern building with a red roof and a tall white tower, surrounded by greenery and other buildings. At the bottom, there are four sections: 'HOST' (ADN - Agence pour le Développement du Numérique), 'PARTNERS' (Africa Connect 3, European Union, and two Beninese government ministries), 'GOLD SPONSOR' (MainOne), and 'BRONZE SPONSORS' (NEC, Coko, and FLEXPOTIX).

Registration is now open for the 6th annual conference of the West and Central African Research and Education Network. The online conference organized by WACREN, in partnership with Agence pour le Développement du Numérique (ADN Benin), will be held during 15 – 19 March 2021.

The multi-session conference, titled ‘Digital transformation for development’, is expected to draw a wide range of participants from across the world, including higher education policy and decision-makers, national research and education networks and their stakeholder communities, government ministries and agencies in charge of higher education and digital transformation, regional political bodies, academics and researchers across the region.

ASREN is committed to supporting the African sister network WACREN in its conference and activities towards building world-class infrastructure and services for the African research and education community under the ongoing AfricaConnect3 co-funded by the European Union. Visit the [conference website](#) to learn more about the conference and register.

**Arab States Research and Education Network**

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