

Successful Case of Multistakeholder Partnerships in Establishing Networks for Women in Nuclear Fields

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Abstract

A multistakeholder partnership in nuclear security and nonproliferation programs involves partners from at least three sectors: the public sector, civic society, the private sector and/or academia. Each partner has specialized knowledge, experience, perspectives and resources that can help others achieve their goals and advance their work. This paper highlights several cases of successful collaborations among various stakeholders: national governments, nongovernmental organizations and U.S. national laboratories in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) in nuclear security, and the unique value these types of collaborative efforts bring to the community.

The paper analyses three cases of effective partnerships in this area: the collaborations between LANL and CNS under DOE NNSA Nuclear Security Women initiative in building two regional networks for women in nuclear security, the partnership between LANL and the World Institute for Nuclear Security to increase transparency and access to information related to DEIA implementation at a national laboratory, and CNS and Nuclear and Energy Research institute (Brazil) collaboration with the support from the Norwegian government, and other U.S. stakeholders to engage women in STEM from Latin America in the discussion of DEI initiatives and practices in the context of nuclear security and nonproliferation.

Recommendations and lessons learned from establishing and maintaining such partnerships will also be shared. The paper will conclude with suggestions on how such partnerships can serve as a model for future similar collaborations supporting DEIA in nuclear fields.

Introduction

As part of the strategy to enhance awareness of DEIA issues in the context of nuclear security and nonproliferation activities, the authors of this paper have led and/or participated in a wide range of partnerships with multiple stakeholders to promote DEIA concepts in these fields. As noted in previous studies, diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and a sense of belonging are critical to successfully implementing nuclear security practices across facilities and organizations.

A multistakeholder partnership in nuclear security and nonproliferation programs includes stakeholders from several sectors: the public sector, civic society, the private sector and/or academia. In the examples that we will further describe below, the collaborations involve non-governmental entities (NGOs), academia, national governments, and U.S. national laboratories. Each partner in these collaborations has specialized knowledge, experience, perspectives and resources that can help others achieve their goals and advance their work. The successes of these partnerships may serve as a model for other similar efforts advancing DEIA concepts in nuclear security and nonproliferation across the world.

Regional Networks under DOE NNSA Nuclear Security Women Initiative

The paper analyses three cases of effective partnerships in this area, and our first example involves a successful collaboration among DOE NNSA Nuclear Security Women initiative, Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, and Los Alamos National Laboratory, to build two regional networks for women in nuclear security – the Black Sea Women in Nuclear (BSWN) Network, and the Women in Nuclear Central Asia (WINCA) Network.

The mission of BSWN and WINCA networks is to connect, support, and empower women in nuclear security and CBRN fields. Interdisciplinary by nature, the networks strive to bring together women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and policy from national governments, industry, civil society, and academia in the Black Sea and Central Asia regions. The networks serve as platforms for nuclear security practitioners and other experts to promote gender equity and increase women's leadership roles, as well as to offer professional exchanges, mentoring, and training opportunities [1]. The WINCA network also plans to facilitate access to joint projects and international collaborations, to create opportunities for professional development of its members, share experiences and consider participation in research work on nuclear and radiological security and safety issues at the regional level [2], and to promote women in CBRN related fields.

Both of these networks include and support women professionals in nuclear and related fields in the regions that have been significantly affected by the recent and current geopolitical events (war in Ukraine, 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake in Türkiye and Syria, various border security tensions and disputes across the regions, etc.). Especially in the times of such crises, these networks serve as impactful platforms to connect, engage, share good practices and information and support each other.

Based on the authors' experience and observation of the networks' activities, these platforms succeed due to several factors:

- Securing effective funding support, including from U.S. DOE NNSA and also from other sponsors, such as the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority)
- Competent management and oversight of the establishment of these networks by CNS and LANL nuclear security experts that have in-depth experience working in complex international settings, and who have fostered successful partnerships in Black Sea and Central Asian regions through prior engagements, such as CNS Visiting Fellows Program, technical exchanges, and other international cooperation projects funded by donor countries, including by the United States
- Regional and in-country expertise of the Black Sea and Central Asia partners that ensures that these collaborations are effective and provide practical, hands-on support for the network members.

Los Alamos National Laboratory – World Institute for Nuclear Security Collaboration on Gender Equality Self-Assessment Tool

The second example of successful multistakeholder engagement on DEIA issues in nuclear security involves LANL collaboration with the World Institute of Nuclear Security (WINS) on piloting WINS Self-Assessment and Evaluation Tool on Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The WINS Self-Assessment is designed to evaluate the maturity of an organization with regard to diversity, equity and inclusion – and to then create an action plan to enhance its maturity in all of these areas.[3] WINS and LANL collaborations have a long and successful history, with several LANL leaders and experts currently serving or having served on the WINS board.

LANL was invited by WINS to be a part of the Tool pilot, as WINS was aware of LANL's previous successful activities and leadership not only in international nuclear security engagements, but also in supporting diversity and inclusion at the Laboratory and in the community (through LANL employee resource groups and also through other DEIA efforts, such as LANL leadership's participation in Gender Champions in Nuclear Policy initiative, as the first U.S. national laboratory GCNP champion).

As part of piloting the WINS Tool, LANL identified a cohort of staff in their Nuclear Engineering and Nonproliferation Division (NEN Division executes most of the international nuclear security work at LANL), who eagerly participated in the self-assessment, and provided their comments before the Tool was launched. During LANL pilot assessment it was identified that leadership and management are key to driving change for better gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. One of the main benefits of this Tool is that it is not only flexible, scalable, accessible (free of charge) and adaptable; it is also geared specifically for the nuclear community.

As part of the pilot, LANL also engaged the leaders in their Diversity Office to review the self-assessment, and this Office enthusiastically followed up on the opportunity to use parts of this tool for future internal LANL DEI efforts.

With the support of senior leadership, LANL Human Resources will be utilizing the WINS tool to survey a large cross-section of LANL leaders, managers, employees, and Human Resources professionals on perceptions of gender equity within LANL workforce. Understanding perceptions and attitudes about the LANL culture and the organization's diversity and inclusion programs and activities will then allow LANL to strategically address needs around gender equality, diversity and inclusion activities, and workforce culture. LANL embraced the use of the WINS tool to provide an opportunity for their staff to voice their perceptions of LANL culture and help the leadership assess and evaluate how LANL is doing regarding gender equality and what improvements can be made.

CNS and Nuclear Energy Research Institute Collaboration with Women in STEM from Latin America and the Caribbean

The third example of multistakeholder engagement describes CNS and Brazil's Nuclear and Energy Research institute (IPEN) collaboration with the support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation to engage women in STEM from Latin America and the Caribbean in the discussion of DEI initiatives and practices in the context of nuclear security and nonproliferation. Such engagement took place under the auspices of the symposium titled "Nuclear Nonproliferation and Security for Women in STEM in Latin America and the Caribbean" in São Paulo, Brazil hosted by IPEN. To make it an all-inclusive event, organizers opened applications to all genders, and provided Portuguese and Spanish interpretation to accommodate all participants with different levels of English-language skills.[4]

Activities devoted to the discussion of DEIA policies and practices included the panel titled "Promoting Peace and Security Through Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)" had speakers representing international organizations such as the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) Speakers from Brazil, Türkiye and the United States joined the discussion on how to be better allies to women in nuclear fields. Of a particular interest was a panel on DEIA hiring policies organized with and attended by leading

representatives from Brazil's industry and government. Briefings on nonproliferation and nuclear security capacity building programs and initiatives aimed at supporting women in STEM. Speakers from the IAEA, WiN Brazil, the World Institute for Nuclear Security (WINS), U.S. national laboratories, and INMM presented on various international, regional, and national DEIA initiatives.

To many participants this symposium was a first-of-its-kind event that they had attended, where they could discuss gender issues while simultaneously increasing their professional understanding of the policies and practices related to nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear security. They also called for continuing engagement as a community through social media and preparation of a document on best practices in DEIA policies, and ways to address challenges for women in STEM.

The symposium demonstrated how well-coordinated and executed partnerships between nongovernmental organizations, academia, research and national governments can serve as a conduit of DEIA policies on regional level.

Lessons and Recommendations from Multistakeholder Partnerships

This section offers lessons learned from establishing and maintaining the multistakeholder partnerships that were described earlier. The authors also share some recommendations that are based on their own experience of working with multiple stakeholders, including sponsors and regional partners, on advancing women and promoting DEIA policies in nuclear security field.

When embarking on a new initiative, especially on regional or international level, it is important to:

- Recognize benefits and value of collaboration and partnerships, as these provide opportunities and access to new resources and audiences that would not be available otherwise. By teaming up with other stakeholders one can expand their reach and opportunities for funding. For example, when establishing the Black Sea Women in Nuclear Network (BSWN), CNS reached out to several potential supporters and was able to secure initial funding and support from two national governments, United States (DOE NNSA) and Sweden (Swedish Radiation Safety Authority, SSM). CNS also partnered with WiN Ukraine and Odesa Center for Nonproliferation to inaugurate BSWN.

- Diversity of sponsors portfolios: concurrent engagements with multiple sponsors can produce remarkable results in that they allow implementers to expand the scope and reach and carry out additional activities. A good example of a multi-sponsor project was the Brazil symposium for women in STEM, where support for this event from multiple sources was secured. While core funding was provided by the Norwegian government, additional funding was secured from the U.S. Department of State and a private foundation – Carnegie Corporation of New York. This enabled CNS to invite additional participants and add extra events allowing for more discussions and interactions between participants.

-Use international conferences and other professional events as platforms for establishing future and strengthening existing partnerships. The support for participation in conferences and other professional events focusing on nuclear security and related fields is invaluable. IAEA ICONS and IMMM annual conference are excellent examples of such platforms, where partnerships between stakeholders from around the world are formed and fostered.

- Have a clear vision and strategy of how a project will be implemented and sustained. A project proposal with a sustainability plan has the potential to attract more stakeholders and increase the probability of funding.

- Have an active social media presence to promote one's own work and the work of all involved partners and share best practices.

- Involve nuclear industry whenever possible. Black Sea Women in Nuclear network has been successful in engaging Romania's nuclear industry sector due to the efforts of its regional leaders. IPEN's close ties with its nuclear industry sector allowed participation of several industry representatives at the symposium for women in STEM. Nonetheless, the authors recognize the need for an even more orchestrated effort to involve nuclear industry in projects aiming at and promoting DEIA in nuclear fields.

Conclusion

The paper described examples of successful multistakeholder partnerships and how these can potentially serve as models for future similar collaborations supporting DEIA in nuclear across other regions, states, organizations, and facilities. The authors drew from their experience of building relationships with multiple stakeholders from governments, academic and research institutions, and civil society that share the common goal of achieving gender balance in nuclear fields and promoting diversity, equity, and accessibility. Several examples noted in this paper demonstrate the importance and significance of multistakeholder involvement in promoting DEIA in nuclear fields. The authors believe that there is a need to continue expanding such partnerships to other sectors, including nuclear industry. These types of collaborations provide valuable and successful tools toward achieving the common goal – to make nuclear fields diverse, inclusive, equitable, and accessible.

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