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TWF'S LATEST STUDY REVEALS NEGATIVE GENDER STEREOTYPES LIMIT GIRLS' SUBJECT CHOICES AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN STEM

Hong Kong, February 10, 2017 – The Women's Foundation (“TWF”) released new research today that demonstrates negative stereotypes continue to persist among Hong Kong girls that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects are more suitable for boys, significantly limiting their choices to pursue STEM subjects and careers. The study also uncovered differences between girls-only schools and co-ed schools in the attitude of students, teachers and parents towards girls in STEM. TWF is calling for a concerted approach by the Government, policy-makers, educators, businesses and parents to address gender stereotypes and barriers, including reviewing the current STEM curriculum and pedagogy through a gender lens, providing more support to teachers, more STEM careers guidance for parents and the promotion of female role models by businesses and in the media.

Commissioned by The Women's Foundation and supported through *Goldman Sachs Gives*, Dr. Dannii Yeung from City University of Hong Kong and Dr. Mario Liong, formerly from Centennial College, conducted a study on factors influencing adolescent girls' choice of STEM subjects. A total of nearly 1,000 Form Three female students and 146 STEM and class teachers from 13 schools participated in the study through self-administered questionnaires.

Key findings include:

- Girls' decision to pursue STEM is significantly influenced by their **early experiences** with those subjects, and their **perception of their own capabilities, interests and career aspirations**. These are all heavily shaped by society, family and schools.
- Girls' **exposure to STEM is limited** at the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) level, with mathematics being the only STEM-related compulsory subject while physics and other science subjects are electives.
- With the exception of biology, many girls find STEM subjects **boring** and describe STEM subjects as characterised by dry concepts, mechanical exercises and an emphasis on individual performance as opposed to group projects.
- Girls at **girls-only schools** are **more confident** in their abilities and more **supported** in their pursuit of STEM subjects than those at co-educational institutions. Teachers at girls-only schools are also more committed to increasing students' confidence and abilities in STEM.
- Many girls **limit themselves because of their own gender biases**, believing STEM is more suitable for boys. At the same time, many girls feel discouraged from pursuing STEM subjects by their parents and teachers and friends, due to enduring gender stereotypes and a lack of accessible female role models.

Increasing women's participation in STEM is one of the core missions of The Women's Foundation. The launch of the research coincides with the kick-off of the second year of TWF's Girls Go Tech Programme, an initiative that provides under-privileged girls with coding and digital literacy foundational skills. To achieve this, TWF is working with a number of leading partners like Accenture, Bloomberg, Capital Group, Cisco,

Education Bureau, Equal Opportunities Commission, Goldman Sachs, Google, HKT Education, MTR Corporation, Operation Santa Claus and Telstra.

From this research, as well as TWF's findings from last year's Girls Go Tech Pilot Programme, key recommendations include:

- **Parents** should provide girls with early positive experiences with STEM, help girls be aware of the possibilities that STEM careers offer and discuss with them the gender biases that could deter them from pursuing their interests in STEM.
- **Schools** should equip teachers with skills to inspire, encourage and enable girls to pursue STEM, offer STEM-related extra-curricular activities and mentoring programmes, and be mindful of not perpetuating gender biases in classrooms.
- **Legislators and policymakers** should make the case for the Government to apply a gender lens and for new policies and programmes that encourage girls to embrace STEM - recognising that girls don't start from the same level of the playing field as boys.
- **Businesses** should consciously promote female STEM role models and actively reach out to schools and communities to help families and girls appreciate the importance of STEM careers.
- **The media** should spotlight more female STEM role models and promote the exciting careers and lifestyle offered by STEM sectors.

"We know that STEM skills are key to our young women playing a meaningful role in the development and definition of emerging fields that will drive the industries of tomorrow," said Su-Mei Thompson, CEO of The Women's Foundation. "We also know girls are far less likely to pursue STEM subjects at DSE level and beyond without more encouragement from their parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Our hope is that this research will serve as a catalyst for systemic change to spur initiative that allow the full participation of girls in STEM in Hong Kong."

"We are pleased to support The Women's Foundation's research which seeks to promote young women's pursuit of STEM studies in Hong Kong," said Stephanie Hui, head of the Merchant Banking Division in Asia Pacific Ex-Japan at Goldman Sachs. "Encouraging young people to develop different skill sets will allow them to maximize their potential and will help contribute to a diverse workforce." Hui is also an honorary trustee of The Women's Foundation.

The recommendations will be distributed to relevant government bodies, education policymakers and other key stakeholders for their consideration.

To read the report and recommendations, visit: <https://twfhk.org/research/girls-and-stem-education-hong-kong>

About Goldman Sachs Gives

Goldman Sachs Gives is a donor-advised fund through which Goldman Sachs and its senior employees can recommend grants to qualified non-profit organizations globally. Established in 2007, *Goldman Sachs Gives* supports charities in communities around the world with a focus on benefiting underserved populations. Its grants support programs that build and stabilize communities, increase educational opportunities, honor service and veterans, and create jobs and economic growth.

About The Women's Foundation

The Women's Foundation is a Hong Kong registered not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong. TWF is focused on challenging gender stereotypes, increasing the number of women in policy and decision-making roles, and empowering women in poverty through ground-

breaking research, innovative and impactful community programmes, and education and advocacy. For more information on The Women's Foundation, please visit www.twfhk.org.

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