

The Inequality Puzzle in Girls' IMO Participation Across Africa and Beyond

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Competitive mathematics should be a space where talent thrives regardless of gender, but in reality, access remains highly unequal. Globally, female participation in the International Mathematics Olympiad (IMO) has remained disproportionately low, with women making up only about 3.2% of gold medalists in IMO history. Even in recent years, female representation has been just 10–13% of total participants (67 out of 618 in 2023 and 81 out of 609 in 2024), with some countries sending no female contestants at all.

Africa faces additional barriers, limited training opportunities, cultural biases, and underrepresentation, which further hinder girls' participation in high-level mathematics. However, change is taking root. The Rwandan Math Olympiad case and the successful hosting of the Pan African Math Olympiad (PAMO) 2023 saw participation grow from 9 to 31 countries, increasing engagement with IMOs across the continent. A key breakthrough was our equal-gender representation model, once seen as ambitious, now being mirrored in other national programs.

This session will explore global and African perspectives on gender disparities in competitive mathematics, the role of policy and mentorship in driving change, and the path forward for scaling these efforts. It will also introduce the launch of the African Olympiad Academy (AOA), a new initiative designed to create sustainable pathways for African students in competitive mathematics. AOA is focused on expanding Olympiad training, fostering mentorship, and advocating for gender-inclusive participation to ensure that talent, not background or gender, defines opportunity.