

Focus on increasing women's participation in underrepresented areas of STEM: DST Secretary

Secretary, Department of Science & Technology (DST) Professor Ashutosh Sharma stressed on the need to focus on increasing women's participation in STEM, particularly in the underrepresented areas like mechanical engineering at the International Summit on Women in STEM.

“Areas like mechanical engineering where the participation of women is less than 10% hugely lag behind in representation of women. Female role models are also absent in these areas and underrepresentation creates a vicious cycle,” Professor Sharma pointed out and urged all concerned to work towards promoting women participation in STEM to bring about a transformation.

The two day International Summit on Women in STEM is being held from 23-24 January 2020 in New Delhi. The Summit on the theme ‘Visualising the Future: New Skylines’ has been planned to boost the participation of women in STEM field for the development of scientific career.

Keynote speakers in the summit include renowned, established as well as young women scientists in STEM from different countries, science communicators, entrepreneurs and industrialists from across the globe.



In the inaugural session held on 23rd January, eminent dignitaries present were Her Excellency Ms Harinder Sidhu, Australian High Commissioner to India, Professor Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science & Technology, Dr Renu Swarup, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Dr Chandrima Shaha, President of the Indian National Science Academy, Dr Dinakar M. Salunke, Director, International Centre For Genetic Engineering And Biotechnology (ICGEB), New Delhi among others.

Professor Sharma highlighted the various schemes and programmes of DST like WOS -A, B for providing opportunities to women scientists and technologists to return to mainstream science and work as bench-level scientists and WOS-C Scheme to train women in laws related to the protection of intellectual property enabling them to seek specialized employment or be self-employed.

Talking about Vigyan Jyoti, an initiative to inspire girl students towards STEM, Professor Sharma said, “In the pilot project there will be 2000 girls selected from various districts from all over India which will be scaled up to 50,000 in coming years. In addition to this, girl students who are part of Vigyan Jyoti programme will also be able to fund their education when admitted to any top institute. As part of the programme, the Department will hold science camps for girl students in and around premier technology institutes such as IITs and NITs,” he added.

“The current era of Industry 4.0 is driven by creation, flow and ownership of information and data. Information and knowledge open up a great opportunity to create a level playing field for women in Industry 4.0,” Professor Sharma emphasised.

Australian High Commissioner to India, Her Excellency Ms Harinder Sidhu, stressed that the necessity of more women in STEM fields goes beyond a requirement for gender parity or gender diversity. She said that women can bring different perspectives to the field altogether. Families, teachers and society have unique roles to play in encouraging women to join STEM fields.

“It is necessary that young women have role models in STEM fields that they can look up to and be encouraged to join similar fields. To bring about a nations' prosperity, it is important to harness the research aptitude in both men and women” said DBT Secretary Dr Renu Swarup.

The summit will be evaluating the current conceptual thinking on increasing the participation of women in STEM, providing a platform for the next generation of women scientists to interact and network with leaders in the field as well as to develop ideas for mentoring of future leaders. The deliberations of STEM ambassadors are expected to inspire the young aspirants who are at crossroads of making a decision of career choice.