



Intervention made by Smt Chandresh Kumari Katoch, Member of Parliament and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women, at the Commission on the Status of Women on February 23, 2011

at the panel discussion on Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work: Key policy initiatives and capacity-building on gender mainstreaming - Focus on science and technology



Madam Chairperson,

Over the years women in India have overcome the traditional mindsets and have excelled in professions like medicine, pure sciences and in the areas of IT and biotechnology. We are proud that today, highly qualified women are in top position. You have just heard how solar energy has been used in Barefoot College.

Government has proactively taken several gender specific measures to enhance gender parity in the field of science and technology.

One of the significant challenges in this regard, which are faced by a large number of well-qualified women scientists, is the "break in their careers" arising out of motherhood and family responsibilities.

An initiative by the Department of Science and Technology, called the "Women Scientists Scheme" has been developed which provides opportunities to women scientists and technologists who desire to return to mainstream science.

Some of other programmatic efforts being taken by government in relation to technology and women include

- a) Provision of opportunities to women scientists to work from home to ensure that the talent of women scientists is not wasted
- b) Large scale involvement of women scientists in developmental programmes
- c) Provision of opportunities to girls in rural areas to access quality inputs in science and mathematics so that they can take up careers in science and engineering, and
- d) Motivation and encouragement to women scientists through National Awards for outstanding performance.

We also have to look at the other dimension of this discussion by looking at incremental benefit of science and technology in women's daily life. This critical perspective of application of technology for societal development has been strengthened in India by setting up of **special Technology Parks for women**. These "Parks" provide technological solutions to the problems faced by women and inspire them to work together on conservation of natural resources.

Technology has been recognized as having tremendous potential to improve the lives of women. Initiatives taken including:

- a) Capacity building of rural women to become entrepreneurs in emerging areas of technology

- b) Dissemination of knowledge to women regarding nutrition, health, water and sanitation.
- c) Use technology initiatives to address occupational health problems of women in the unorganised farm and non-farm sectors such as construction, post-harvest processing, agriculture, and small scale manufacturing through suitable tools and implements.
- d) Enhance the impact of energy related technology such as solar energy, biogas, smokeless chulah (stoves), have revolutionized the way of life of rural women. Less time is spent on collecting firewood and adverse impact on women's health has been mitigated.
- e) In India the mobile telephone has revolutionised empowerment of women, not just economically and medically, but also in matters related to market information, violence against women, and social empowerment in general.
- f) The IT revolution and Social Media (like facebook, orkut) have opened up immense opportunities for women. Some statistics say that women are the largest users of social media and the balance of job opportunity in the field of IT is tipped in favour of women.

There are also some disturbing aspects of science and technology regarding which due care is to be taken. One unfortunate negative impact has been the prenatal diagnostic testing, which has resulted in increased incidence of selective female feticide. Strong legislative measures have been strengthened with strict legal penalties to tackle this menace to address declining sex ratios.

I want to conclude by an interesting study which was undertaken by Technology Park for women. When rural women were asked "what they expect from technology" one said, "technology to me means a bus designed... so that I could carry vegetable baskets, goats, hens, etc for sale in the city markets inside the bus instead of putting them on the roof. It is very inconvenient in a sari to climb up to keep produce on the roof."

Another expressed, "Technology to me means a cotton cloth which I can put to different uses to cover my baby, to make a cradle for my baby, to tie up seeds collected and even tie up the fodder/firewood I bring back home".

Yet another respondent said, "I have been working in the salt brine in Kutch... the protective shoes developed by scientists are uncomfortable and hot. Moreover, they do not look nice with my traditional attire. Can technology help me?"

There is an urgent need to engender scientific temper with availability of low cost science and technology to have a purposeful and qualitative change in women's life. I am glad this need is now being internationally focused.

Thank you.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)