

Financing for Gender Equality: Women in Science, Engineering and Technology

Parallel event held at the CSW 52

**Organized by
The National Commission of Women in India,
the American Chemical Society,**

opportunities, and sustainable sources of energy and water to reduce their work burdens, improve the health and well-being of their families and communities, and ensure sustainable livelihoods.

Already in 1995, Member States committed, through the Beijing Platform for Action, to ensuring that women and girls have equal access to science and technology. The Platform noted that science curricula are gender-biased and that girls are often deprived of basic education in mathematics, science and technical training. It emphasized that access to advanced study in science and technology was needed to prepare women to take an active role in the technological and industrial development of their countries.

The Platform called for provision of information to women and girls on the availability and benefits of vocational training and programmes in science and technology, and for diversification of vocational and technical training to improve access to and retention of women and girls. It noted the importance of adaptation of curricula and teaching materials to develop a supportive environment and for positive measures to ensure the full range of occupational choices in non-traditional careers for women and girls, including in areas of science and technology where they were under-represented.

Despite these very positive commitments more than 10 years ago, which were reiterated in 2000, women and girls continue to be excluded from equal participation in science and technology in many parts of the world as a result of their unequal status in society – legally, socially, politically and economically. Poverty, lack of education and training and unequal employment opportunities remain significant constraints. The exclusion of women and girls occurs in the public sector, in private sector companies, and in research institutions.

A recent UNESCO report (2007) indicates that women and girls still lag behind in relation to opportunities for education and training in science and technology. Even though there has been considerable progress in recent decades, gender disparities in science and technology are significant in secondary and tertiary level education,

Similarly, the report revealed that even though women have made inroads in employment in different areas of science and technology, there are serious remaining disparities in relation to pay, promotion, and access to certain areas of specialization.

Not surprisingly, the report also highlighted that women are also under-represented in scientific and technological research, particularly at top levels and are not equally represented in decision-making in important bodies on science and technology.

Greater attention to increasing access and involvement of women and girls to science and technology is required in institutions of higher education - including faculties of science and engineering, research and development centres, scientific and professional associations and societies, and bodies and networks focused on the promotion and coordination of science and technology at national, regional and international levels.

The statistics available on women's representation in all areas of science and technology leave much to be desired.

Let me give one example from the area of ICT, where the Division for the Advancement of Women has recently done some work. Most poor women in developing countries are further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share. Women's capacity to exploit the potential of the new ICT as tools for empowerment is constrained in different ways. Some constraints are linked to factors that affect both women and men, including access to technical infrastructure, connection costs, and computer literacy.

Other factors constraining access and use, such as poverty, illiteracy and language skills are particularly acute for women because of existing inequalities. Women are, for example, less likely to own communication assets, such as radios, mobile phones and computers. In addition, gender roles and relationships – which lead to limited mobility for women and girls, unequal access to resources, unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities with resulting limited free time, and inability to access communal resources because of security risks - play a key role in determining the capacity of women to participate on equal terms with men in the information society.

As a result, women are the minority of users of ICT in almost all developed and developing countries. The trend towards inequality in access and use starts early. In the United States it has been estimated that boys are five times more likely than girls to use home computers, and parents spend twice as much on ICT products for their sons as they do for their daughters.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2001) noted that patterns of gender segregation are being reproduced in the information economy with women concentrated in end-user, lower-skilled ICT jobs related to word processing and data entry and men in more senior managerial and administration positions and in the design of networks, operating systems and software.

In most countries, women are under-represented in ICT. The trend

