



Mains Practice Question

Q. Including more women in science and applied technologies is critical for the advancement of society. Discuss.

15 Mar, 2021 GS Paper 2 Social Justice

Approach

- Start the answer by mentioning the status of gender equality in India.
- Discuss the status of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields.
- Suggest some measures to improve women's participation in STEM fields.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

Since independence, successive governments in India have taken many steps in bringing gender empowerment. However, various developmental indices like Global Gender Gap Index 2020 where India ranks in 112th place, reflect that still, a lot needs to be done in this regard.

One such area of improvement is increasing gender participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields.

Body

Status of Women in STEM Fields

- About 43% of STEM graduates in India may be women, which is the highest in the world, but women's share in STEM jobs in India is a mere 14%.
- Most of the women STEM graduates in India either pursue another career or do not work at all. Women across the world face the 'leaky pipeline' problem in STEM fields.
 - Women leave the workforce, due to the absence of supportive institutional structures during pregnancy, safety issues in fieldwork and the workplace.
- The STEM field is so perpetuated with gender stereotypes. It has a very strong male-dominated culture. Further, there is a lack of role models for girls and women.
- Not just societal norms but issues related to poor education and healthcare access are responsible for a lesser number of women in these fields.

Way Forward

- **Leveraging Digital India:** With the launch of Digital India, there has been a dramatic rise in terms of increased access to the internet across the country.
 - Thus, digital India provides an opportunity to impart education in the STEM field to women.
- **Replicating ISRO Model:** The role of women engineers in the launch of the Indian Space Research Organisation's second moon mission, Chandrayaan-2 shows that how social shackles pertaining to women are loosening.

- Thus, there is a need for emulating ISRO's model in STEM fields.
- **Bringing Behavioral Change:** Subdued gender participation emanates from social-economic issues, which can be treated by bringing behavioral change.
 - For this, the contributions of women in the STEM sector should be highlighted in textbooks.
 - This may motivate the next generation of girls to be leaders in the STEM sector.

Conclusion

A recent research report by McKinsey said that narrowing the gender gap in STEM can lead to an increase of \$12-28 trillion in the global economy. Thus, India should look at Gender equality as an essential facet of the development perspective.

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