

Innovative schemes needed to nurture and engage women in STEM

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India has the highest number of women graduates in science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM). About 43% of STEM graduates are women, but their share in STEM jobs in India is merely 14%. There is a pressing need to improve the participation of women in fields that have consistently been dominated by men.

"Dedicated awards to celebrate women's contribution will not only provide visibility to the work done but also encourage more girls to join STEM-related fields and help in getting funds to keep working on scientific problems and venture into new areas,"

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says Neetu Singh, assistant professor in the Center for Biomedical Engineering, IIT Delhi, who recently received the Janaki Ammal-National Women Bioscientist Award 2020-21.

The award is to recognise the contribution of senior and young women scientists working in the field of biology and biotechnology. Singh received the young category award (below 45 years) for her contributions towards imperatives in developing nano-based platform technologies for healthcare applications. An alumnus of University of Mumbai, Singh says,

innovative schemes can help tackle the underrepresentation of women.

"One of the solutions could be by providing early opportunities to every girl with an appropriate



stipend and with time-wise flexibility to join research labs. This can help break the myths around scientific research and related fields. Except for the professional qualification and merit, other service-related norms can be more women-centric," she adds.

While innovation is gender-neutral, having both men and women in the workplace brings different perspectives for a single problem. "Diverse workforce leads to better outcome. According to UN projections, female representation is ~50% of the total population, so not having them involved is basically losing a significant portion's contributions," says Singh.



Neetu
Singh