

Source: The Straits Times, Page A14
Date: 15 March 2023

Participation in Stem fields key for women's development: Sun Xueling

Economic growth unsustainable sans their involvement in tech and innovation, she says

Syarafana Shafeeq

Women becoming involved in innovation and technology is key for their development, and economic growth without this would not be sustainable.

Progress made by women in terms of education, economic empowerment and employment could also be eroded if they do not participate in innovation and technological change, the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women has warned.

These points were made by Minister of State for Social and Family

Development Sun Xueling on Monday at the International Women in Stem and Medicine Symposium at Rochester Commons in the Buona Vista area. Stem stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

She said the global average of female tech professionals in Stem fields is about 28 per cent.

"Like Singapore, many other countries reiterated their commitment to increase the involvement of women in Stem in their countries and to remove impediments which might hinder women and girls from entering Stem," said Ms Sun.

As one of the top tech hubs in the world, Singapore is well placed to encourage more women to join Stem fields. About 41 per cent of Singapore's tech professionals are women, she added.

Ms Sun said providing the best possible opportunities for women across all sectors, especially in high-growth areas like tech, will enable businesses to remain competitive and economies to prosper.

The SG Women in Tech movement by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), which is supported by community partners, inspires and motivates girls and women to pursue careers in the tech sector through providing networking and mentorship opportunities, she said.

Singapore's schools and institutes of higher learning (IHL) also

SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE

Beyond legislation and policies, mindset shifts are required to break gender biases and traditional expectations of roles that men and women play. A whole-of-society partnership is necessary to shift the narrative from 'what is' to 'what can be'.



MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
SUN XUELING

play an important role in nurturing young talent in Stem, and the SG Digital Scholarship provides support for undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

In the past five years, IMDA has awarded the scholarship to a growing number of top female tech talent to pursue courses in cyber security, information technology and Stem in general, Ms Sun added.

In 2021, 31 per cent of SG Digital Scholarship recipients were women, and almost four in 10 students enrolled to pursue Stem majors at IHLs were women.

There has also been progress in the field of medicine, and it is heartening to see the upward trend of female students in the field, Ms Sun said.

In the past, women were given

only one-third of available places in the National University of Singapore medical faculty – the only medical school then.

In the latest undergraduate cohort, female students made up an overwhelming 65.3 per cent of the medical intake, Ms Sun added.

Ms Sun also brought up the importance of ensuring conducive work environments for women, places for women in leadership and governance, and male allyship.

"Beyond legislation and policies, mindset shifts are required to break gender biases and traditional expectations of roles that men and women play," she said.

"A whole-of-society partnership is necessary to shift the narrative from 'what is' to 'what can be'."

Men can play a very important role in this area, she said.

"Men can champion equal opportunities at work, thus enabling women to break glass ceilings and empowering them to achieve their career goals."

"At home, parents are important role models for their children, and should nurture boys and girls not to be limited by gender stereotypes, and encourage their aspirations in Stem."

syarafanams@sph.com.sg