

Expert Group Meeting: “Women in Space”

Opening Remarks by Ms. Lakshmi Puri,

UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women

Ms. Simonetta Di Pippo,

Distinguished experts,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Warm welcome to UN Women. I am very pleased to be here with this inspirational group of experts who have come to attend this meeting in which we have worked collaboratively with UNOOSA, UN Women’s Youth Focal Point, colleagues from Economic Empowerment Section and our Youth and STEM Task Force, co-led by UN Women with our partner “Futuristas”.

My sincere thanks to Ms. Simonetta Di Pippo, Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs for her leadership and vision in placing gender equality and women’s empowerment high on the agenda of UNOOSA. In addition to promoting gender equality in the space sector and making space work for women, I know that colleagues from the sister agency have worked with her to change “*mankind*” to “*humankind*” in the official UNOOSA language and this is a very important step forward.

Introduction of UN Women

Let me take the opportunity to give you a brief introduction to UN Women as many of you may not be very familiar with our work.

UN Women is the only 21st century UN entity with the mandate to promote and realize the most transformative and, with the biggest potential, project for humanity. As global champion for gender equality, UN Women has become an impactful entity that advances global norms and standards on gender equality and women’s rights.

Through provisioning technical and financial support as well as building collaborations between civil society and local and national governments, UN Women provides support to requesting Member States in their implementation of those global standards within their national contexts.

UN Women also leads and monitors the system-wide progress on its gender equality work. UN Women is also a global advocate for gender equality, women's empowerment and the rights of women in all regions and countries.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, UN Women earned a very special role and responsibility within the UN System and in the larger international community to deliver as the gender equality agenda has been widely recognized as a key component of sustainable development and its success.

Indeed, within the 2030 Agenda, SDG-5, committed Member States to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The Agenda also identified gender-sensitive targets in 11 SDGs, and stressed the importance of all SDGs and the entire agenda to deliver for gender equality. Further, the 2030 Agenda explicitly recognized the need for enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, as a means of implementation.

UN Women & STEM

- At UN Women we have a fundamental belief that gender equality and women's empowerment will not be achieved if women and girls are not engaged in some of the most influential and growing sectors in society, namely STEM.
- We see how these disciplines underlie so many of the SDGs, from energy, to nutrition, to health, to infrastructure, and when one looks at the impact of ICTs, this influence extends to education, political participation, social justice and so on.

- We are facing enormous challenges globally and we need to deploy STEM as deliberately and smartly as possible as a means of developing innovative and far reaching solutions.
- We approach this mandate on three levels, STEM based applications for women, promoting women's leadership, participation and representation in STEM, and engagement in developing a more just and inclusive STEM ecosystem overall.

The evidence: Women's empowerment in the STEM sector is not only the right thing to do but it is also a smart investment.

- Evidence shows that in terms of economic growth, 144 developing countries would increase their GDP by 8 trillion if 600 million women and girls have access to ICT.
- More women in STEM would move the needle to more sustainable consumption and production patterns and environmental sustainability.
- STEM gender parity would contribute to greater social capital, equality and empowerment and enable women to be part of and benefit from the technology-driven jobs revolution underway in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Yet evidence also shows that much is to be done if gender equality is to be achieved.

- The recent World Bank Report on Digital Dividends shows that number of women in STEM falls continuously from secondary school to university, laboratories, teaching, policy making and decision-making.
- There are great divides in women's access to, participation and leadership within STI sectors, despite being on the frontlines of energy use, climate change adaptation, economic production, and holders of extensive traditional knowledge.
- In the formal sector of STI, women globally make up under 10 per cent of those in innovation hubs and those receiving funding by venture capitalists, and only 5 per cent of membership in national academies in science and technology disciplines.

- **There are similar low figures around women in research and development, publication, leadership in government and the private sector, and so on.** The disconnect between women’s practical and regular interface with STI and their formal ability to take advantage of these sectors and in having their knowledge, perspectives and leadership valued is stark indeed.

UN Women work on addressing gender gaps in the STEM

UN Women is committed to addressing these gaps through different mechanisms-, STEM based applications for women, promoting women in STEM, and engagement in developing a more just and inclusive STEM ecosystem overall. Our focus is on women’s economic empowerment, as well as youth engagement and creating the next generation of young women who are STEM literate, skilled and poised to become top leaders and influencers in these sectors.

So how does the space sector fit into this?

- Space is a true source of inspiration, wonder, imagination, and possibilities.
- It offers tools for tackling key development issues from use of satellite technology for agriculture and disaster, to communications technology that benefits education and access to health care, to space research that leads to improved food security and sustainable energy.
- Moreover, the space sector employs innovative methodologies that can be applied everywhere. All of these are of direct relevance to women’s empowerment.
- There are however challenges in “grounding” space so not seen as remote and a luxury and to better understand how the space sector impacts challenges faced in the everyday world and people’s lives.
- This can be particularly challenging for developing countries and for women and girls who are greatly under-represented in STEM sectors and more marginalized when it comes to enjoying the benefits of STEM and space research and technology.
- So we need to meet the challenge of developing the most responsive direct or spin off applications, to expand women’s participation in and uptake of

space technology, to better raise awareness of the amazing contributions space can provide to benefit society and to inspire young women to go into this sector, and critically, to keep and promote women in STEM and space sectors once they are in the pipeline.

- In your discussions over the next two days the importance of social norms, bias, culture, and stereotypes will no doubt have a place of prominence. This cannot be under-emphasized.
- **Women's engagement also matters for the space sector as well.**
 - Studies have continuously shown that diversity breeds success and greater innovation.
 - Women have a different set of perspectives, needs and a set of skills that – as a result of gendered nurturing – are seen as critical for the 21st century, like collaboration, communication, multitasking, etc.
 - Women have been drivers of advances in space throughout history and we now need to better advance their own prospects in this field and accelerate tapping this pool of talent.
 - One encouraging story comes from South Africa where teenage girls are helping to put satellites in space. Under a STEM programme, they developed the first private satellite in Africa to go into space aiming at monitoring agriculture and food security once launched. It is stories like these that we need to highlight more as well.
- We need to do more to engage around these issues and to ensure that STEM and Space works for women and that women are active in shaping this overall ecosystem and related sectors – as equal voices in policy making, and as developers and beneficiaries.
- We need to understand the linkages between space development and the broader context around gender equality. This is where UN Women is well positioned to be the partner of choice.
- We also need to create stronger bridges between the two communities. We need our gender constituency and community to be more engaged

around STEM in creating demand around education, skills, policy and regulation and investments.

- At UN Women, we have a number of initiatives that can directly contribute to this work, from policy engagement in the Commission in the Status of Women and its Youth Forum, to the Equals partnership around digital development, to our Women's Empowerment Principles aimed at employers and the business sector, to STEM skill development through our global WeLearn platform and through county level initiatives.
- Our newly launched Youth STEM Task Force seeks to engage with the UN system, civil society, the youth and stem focused groups, and other partners to advance young women's participation in the development of STEM policy, skills, and solutions.

Conclusion

- I would like to finalize remembering the late Sally Ride who joined NASA in 1978 and became the first American woman in space in 1983. In a 2006 interview with the Academy of Achievement in Washington D.C. she stressed that (and I quote) ... *"I would like to be remembered as someone who was not afraid of doing what she wanted to do, and someone who took risks along the way in order to achieve her goals."*
- As her I would like all of us to be remembered as the generation who was not afraid to bring bold change about, who took risks and made gender equality the reality of our time. Planet 5050 by 2030. We have a goal. Let us make it happen!
- I wish you a productive meeting. We look forward to learning from all of you in identifying some concrete next bold steps after the EGM.
- Let us leverage on the community gathered here towards an impactful 'Women and Space programme'.

Thank you!!