



Editorials/Opinions Analysis For UPSC 24 February 2022

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A more inclusive science

Context:

Underrepresentation of Women in science academies is a matter of concern as in these academies, there is significant exclusion of women scientists irrespective of their ability or contribution.

Relevance:

GS-II: Gender, Issues Related to Women



Dimensions of the Article:

1. Underrepresentation of women in the sciences
2. Global findings/studies related to underrepresentation of women
3. Initiatives to promote Gender Equality in IAS
4. Need for Gender Equality in Science Academies
5. Way Forward

Underrepresentation of women in the sciences:

- Historically, scientific academies have been dominated by men with the significant exclusion of women scientists, irrespective of their contributions and work.
- Underrepresentation of [women in the sciences](#) has been a matter of debate and this exists not only in recruitment and promotion but across their entire career. It includes in selection to science academies as members/fellows, in awards and in leadership positions in scientific institutions.
- The status of women's representation in science academies reflects their overall position in the scientific community

Global findings/studies related to underrepresentation of women:

- The early part of the 20th century witnessed the acceptance of women scientists as members in many of the European academies.
- However, the global picture of science academies also reveals considerable underrepresentation of women.
- As per the recent study jointly conducted by GenderInSITE, the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) and the International Science Council (ISC) shows that-
 - the elected membership of women in senior academies increased marginally from 13 per cent in 2015 to 16 per cent in 2020.
 - However, in 19 academies it is 10 per cent or less.
 - In the case of young academies, the position is better although there is under-representation as the average share is 42 per cent.
- **A study conducted in 2020**, found that-
 - only a third of them (34 per cent) had developed a specific strategy to enhance women's participation and merely 16 per cent of them have a budget for activities to promote gender equality.
- What is more worrisome is the severe under-representation in academies in specific fields; in engineering sciences and mathematics, women are just 10 per cent and 8 per



cent respectively.

- **In Indian context:**

- In 2015, it was worse with 6 per cent women scientist members out of 864 members.
- **Indian National Science Academy (INSA):** The survey conducted in 2020 showed that out of 1,044 members of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), only 89 are women, amounting to 9 per cent.
 - Its governing body had seven women out of 31 members in 2020, while there were no women members in 2015.
 - In 2019, INSA elected its first woman president, Chandrima Shaha.

Initiatives to promote Gender Equality in IAS:

- **Recent Initiatives of the IAS:** Some of the recent initiatives of the IAS are notable.
 - Recognising gender equality as enshrined in the Constitution and the reality of discrimination, sexual harassment, gender bias and inadequacies in institutional infrastructures, it has adopted the five policy commitments-namely
- Promote gender equality as an explicit human right;
- identify and eliminate practices that create systemic and structural impediments to the advancement of women in science;
- support the empowerment of women to enable them to flourish in the scientific profession;
- identify potential risks and hindrances to women in their pursuit of science and implement strategies to eliminate them; and
- engage with the Government of India, scientific institutions and the civil society to promote and support gender equality in general, and in science in particular.”
- The academy’s assurance to set specific goals and periodically monitor progress are steps in the right direction.
 - It is noteworthy that the IAS is prioritising addressing issues of under-representation within the institution rather than making general observations and suggestions.
- The three academies, the Indian National Science Academies (INSA), the Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS) and the National Academies (NAS) are striving to enhance the representation of women in science, including in professional bodies and related institutions.
- In 2017 and 2018, to address the severe imbalance in terms of gender, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences decided to elect only women as members with 10 in 2017 and six in 2018, as women were just 13 per cent of its 556 members

Need for Gender Equality in Science Academies:



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- Underrepresentation of women is a common problem in all spheres of life, its persistence in science shows that scientists and science academies need to develop policies and strategies to enhance the representation of women.
 - Scientific academies should reflect upon their role and contributions to promote and retain women in science, thereby making science inclusive and sensitive.
 - The initiative to enhance the current representation in fellowships and the governing body will address a long-felt need, ensuring that the first step has been taken to tackle existing inequities in science.
 - Efforts to ensure gender equity in science should not be limited to the [science academies](#) alone, it needs to be done by all stakeholders.

Way Forward:

- India's forthcoming Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (STIP) is keenly looked upon by many for thrust on gender equity and inclusion especially in the science academies.
- However, it would be better if the academies set a precedent in matters of women's under-representation by acting internally, without any external compulsion or pressure.

-Source: The Indian Express