

DA and DST* co-host brainstorming session for review of National Awards for Women's Development



Session participant group photo with Dr Ashok Khosla

Development Alternatives co-hosted a brainstorming session for **Review of National Awards for Women's Development through Application of Science & Technology** on 15 February 2024, at DA's headquarters in New Delhi. Department of Science & Technology (DST) instituted the National Awards for Women's Development through Application of Science & Technology to recognise the contribution of individuals/institutions who have worked at the grassroots level for women's development through application of Science and Technology (S&T). The award was open for resident Indian citizens and institutions registered in India except employees of Department of Science & Technology and those who have already received this Award. The objective of the discussion was to review the national award, ways to strengthen it and to ensure more applications are received for it. Many women experts from various sectors participated in this session and gave their valuable inputs on strengthening the awards and to recognise women who are working for women empowerment. The distinguished guests included Dr K Vijayalakshmi, Former Vice President, DA; Dr Vibha Gupta, Founder/Director Center of Sciences for Villages, Wardha and the chairperson of Magan Sangrahalaya Samiiti (MSS); Dr Rita Dhodapkar, Principal Technical Officer, Science Secretary, NEERI; Dr Anuradha Pughat, Scientist D, Department of Science and Technology; Ms Sangeeta Baksi, Scientist-F, TIFAC, Department of Science and Technology, Gol among many others.

The session was chaired by Dr Shashi Bala, University of Science and Technology, Rajasthan, Former Director, National Institute of Pharmaceuticals Education and Research, Hyderabad. Some of these participants included former awardees as well. Dr Anuradha Pughat, Scientist D, Department of Science and Technology, while presenting the brief overview on awards said that the mission of this award was to recognise women's development through science and technology. The National Awards for Women's Development through Application of Science & Technology was first conferred in 2001. It has been awarded to people who have made exceptional contributions for women's development.

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The essential criteria for the Award are that person should be a citizen of India and have at least 10 years of experience at the grassroots level of science and technology. Dr Pughat said that in 2007 the honorarium was revamped from INR 1 lakh to INR 5 lakh for individuals and for institutions it was enhanced from INR 10 lakh to INR 15 lakh. But over the years the nomination has declined, and no one has been awarded since 2019. The experts were asked to give recommendations/suggestions to strengthen the awards and to revamp it.

In her opening remarks said that there has been an increase in participation of women in the biological sciences, almost doubled since 2014. But women in the leadership role are still very few. She said that their job is to encourage women to participate for the award. She felt that the prime reason behind less applications for the award is the information gap. A more transparent system and process are essential so that more applications from those eligible are received. Dr Sangeeta Bakshi Scientist-F, TIFAC, Department of Science and Technology, GoI, presented an overview of the Award through a presentation. She asserted that the objective of the Award is to witness how things are moving forward, how women are being benefited, and how this Award impacts society for women at large through the application of science and technology. She agreed that there has not been much publicity for the Award.

The session was divided into three parts. Where the first part focused on the general views of the participants. Later moderator threw a few questions to ponder upon.

Ms Zeenat, Senior Vice President and Chief Knowledge Officer, Development Alternatives Group, moderated the session, briefed the expert panel about the flow of the discussion. She asked the experts to focus on the following aspects during their discussion:

- How can we make it more aspirational based on past learning?
- How can we reposition the Award in the view of changed perception?
- How can this Award set benchmark for women in science in the category of Nari Shakti Puraskar?

Some valuable inputs were given by former awardees. Dr Seema Bhaduria Principal & Professor, Balwant Vidyapeeth Rural Institute said that the Award must be for intervention in science and technology. She also suggested that it can be classified into three categories - one for Innovation; the second can be communicating the already developed technologies to the society; and the third can be popularising these technologies through any method of communication. Suggesting some modifications in the selection process of the Award, Dr K Vijayalakshmi said women scientists should get encouragement right from the beginning of their careers. She asserted the need to promote the Award. Dr Vibha Gupta advocated for the need of a dedicated desk to focus on the neglected areas of women's issues and a new cell for the women scientists.



Inputs from other experts:

Prof. Ravinder Kaur HoD, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences- IIT Delhi said that the Award should be only for women. She expressed her disagreement regarding the eligibility criteria and process of the award. In her opinion, the eligibility criteria of 10 years of experience and the requirement of a PG degree need to be re-evaluated. She felt that people have made a huge impact without the relevant experience. She also highlighted the need to add different sectors every year to cover the cutting-edge innovations. Many others agreed with her on the need to dilute the eligibility criteria of the award and to focus on publicising it. Some even suggested using communication channels like social media, print media, FM Radio, and even regional channels to publicise it. Dr Rita Dhodapkar added that the focus should also be on publicising the inspirational life stories of the previous awardees. Some also advocated for self-nomination.

Dr Shashi Bala concluded the session. She said there is certainly the need for reviewing the Title of the award and awards should be given in multiple categories but must focus on women only. The experts also agreed that eligibility criteria should be restricted to innovations through the application of science and technology and there should be a communication campaign to ensure it reaches the last mile and innovative ways should be used for that.



The Action points for future are as follows:

Action Points for future:

- The title should be reframed.
- There should be multiple categories for the Award.
- Eligibility criteria should be restricted to innovations through the application of science and technology.
- There should be a communication campaign to ensure it reaches the last mile and innovative ways should be used for that. Success and life stories of awardees should also be told.
- What happened after the award should be the benchmark.
- Neglected regions like the Northeast should also be focused on.
- 3 referees should also be included in the eligibility criteria.
- A separate website for the Award should be created.
- Award should be solely for women.