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*"I have always appreciated the social activities that encourage women's engagement in STEM. From my observation, although more female students are now joining science and engineering programs, their numbers are still limited compared to men.*

*At the Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC), where I work, we have made many efforts to support and encourage female participation. Over the years, ITC has introduced several measures – such as waiving certain activity fees, offering a 50% tuition discount for female students, and giving priority to women applicants when their performance is comparable to men's. Thanks to these initiatives, the number of female students has gradually increased.*

*Within ITC, women are now well represented in certain programs, such as Food and Chemistry Engineering, where about 85% of students are female. However, in other engineering fields, we are still working hard to achieve gender balance. A higher number of female students in STEM will eventually lead to more women working in technical professions. I always encourage my female students to pursue their passion in energy and engineering fields – showing them, through my own career, that it is possible.*

However, the reality after graduation is quite different. Many women engineers end up working as sales engineers rather than in technical or energy-related roles. The energy sector still offers very limited opportunities for women compared to fields such as medicine, architecture, sales, or IT. Finding the right female candidate for technical positions remains a challenge.

In our society, women with strong academic backgrounds are often discouraged from pursuing engineering careers because of the high competition with men. Many companies still believe that men are more suitable for technical and on-site jobs – assuming they are more flexible, can work overnight, handle fieldwork, and cope better with harsh conditions such as heat. Meanwhile, women are often seen as better suited for sales positions, believed to have softer skills and a friendlier approach.

Gender stereotypes are still deeply rooted in many company HR mindsets. Women are sometimes viewed as short-term employees who may eventually leave their jobs to focus on raising a family. It is commonly assumed that managing both family and professional life is too heavy a burden – and that women will eventually have to give up one.

When women have children and continue working, childcare becomes a major concern. In some families, grandparents can help care for the grandchildren, but not everyone is that fortunate. Others have to rely on babysitters or childcare centers, which are often costly and, in some cases, unreliable. Sometimes, a woman's entire income is just enough to cover the babysitter's fee.

I often ask myself: Why is childcare not provided by institutions? Why the maternity leave in Cambodia is only three months in total – before and after delivery – which is far from enough? Affordable childcare services are one of the key solutions to fighting gender stereotypes. Institutions such as universities, schools, and ministries should have their own childcare facilities. This would make it easier for breastfeeding mothers and help them work with peace of mind. When employees feel supported and relaxed, their productivity increases – and so does their happiness. Quality childcare services at the workplace can make a huge difference for both employees and organizations.

Through my professional journey, I've had the opportunity to meet many women scientists across Asia. We often share the same challenges – balancing career and family. During one of the Indian-ASEAN congresses I attended, most women participants expressed similar concerns about what we call the double journey: managing professional and domestic responsibilities at the same time.

While modern technologies and home appliances have eased some household burdens, only middle- to high-income families can afford them. As a result, women are still expected to take on most household chores, even when they have full-time jobs.

*The fight against gender stereotypes is not only a women's issue – it's a men's issue too. We should all stop labeling jobs as "for men" or "for women." For example, mechanical or industrial engineering is often seen as men's work because people associate it with physical labor, fixing machines, or climbing poles. But not all mechanical engineers work in such conditions – many are designers or researchers, where physical strength is not a key requirement.*

*I believe that women can successfully manage both family and career, but they need the support and understanding of their families, especially their husbands. Husbands should recognize the professional demands of their spouses and share household responsibilities. Nowadays, only some men are open to this, while many still believe that a woman's primary role is to raise the family. Men must realize that childcare and household work are also forms of unpaid labor that deserve respect and shared responsibility.*

*When both partners work in similar fields and have the same level of education, it's often easier to share responsibilities fairly. I believe our society has a kind heart. If men and women can understand each other better and adopt a more open mindset, we can create a future where women feel empowered to follow their dreams, employers care more about their staff, and both families and workplaces become happier and more balanced."*