108 LOCAL YOUNG WOMEN CHOSEN FOR MISSION SHAKTHISAT

BY NOMTHANDAZO NKAMBULE

Eswatini has marked a historic milestone with the official launch of Mission ShakthiSat, a global initiative empowering girls in STEM and space science.

At the heart of this mission are 108 outstanding young women from Eswatini, selected to represent the nation in developing satellite payloads that will orbit the moon next year. Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Savannah Maziya emphasised the significance of this achievement:

"From across our kingdom, 108 outstanding young women have been chosen.

"I am pleased to note that almost 60% have already completed much of their online training a reflection of their commitment and curiosity," she said at the launch of mission Shakthisat.

The mission, championed by AUDA-NEPAD and led by Dr Srimathy Kesan of Space Kidz India, will see Eswatini participants join peers from 107 countries in Chennai, India, for hands-on satellite development.



Minister of Information, Communication and Technology Savannah Maziya at the launch of Mission ShakthiSat.

"This is a historic first for Eswatini, as young women from the kingdom will have their experiments orbiting the moon," the minister said and further underscored the broader impact: "Globally, women make up only 20–30% of the space workforce.

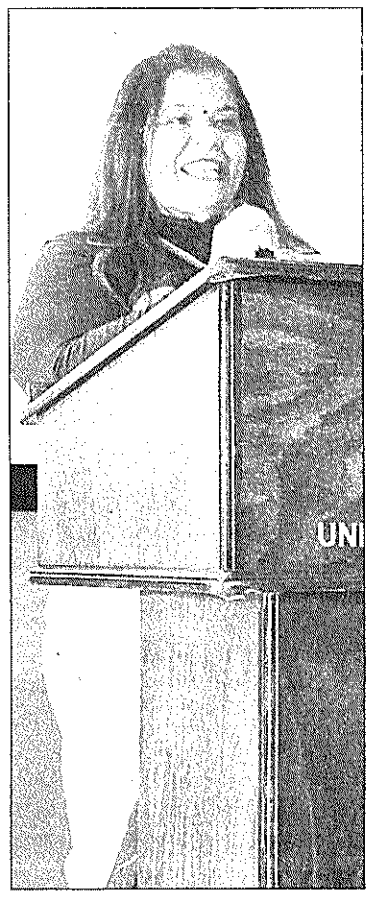
In Eswatini, only 3% of female university students study pure sciences, 4% choose IT and women hold just 25% of technical roles in the energy sector.

These numbers must change and through Mission ShakthiSat, they will."

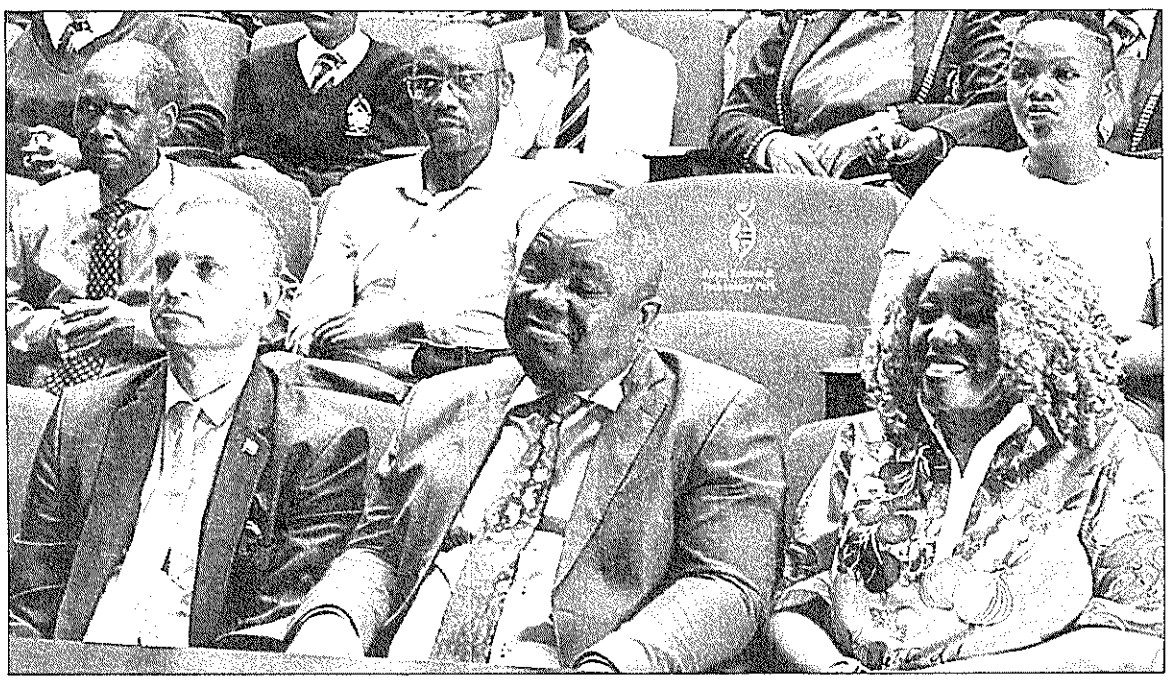
The initiative builds on national programmes such as Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, STEM Future Pioneers, She Powers Africa, Stardust Eswatini, the National Coding Initiative, Girls in ICT Scholarships and others.

It also aligned with the country's upcoming Space Science Strategy, revised STI Policy and AI and 4IR/5IR strategies, positioning girls at the center of a knowledge-based economy.

Adding, the minister said, "to our young women: dream boldly, work with dedication and rise fearlessly. You belong in laboratories, boardrooms, and mission control centres. The stars are not far, they are your destination."



Space Kids India CEO Dr Srimathy Kesan delivering her speech during the launch.



Minister of Education and Training Owen Nxumalo flanked by ICT Minister Savannah Maziya and Indian High Commissioner Ram Prasad.



Dignitaries and the young women.

Launch celebrates India - Eswatini partnership

Indian High Commissioner to Eswatini Ram Prasad says the launch of Mission ShakthiSat in the country celebrates not only a pioneering space initiative, but also the shared aspirations of India and Eswatini for technology, innovation and women-led development.

Prasad emphasised that Eswatini's participation in Mission ShakthiSat sends a powerful signal.

"Eswatini's decision to join this initiative and to recruit and train 108 girls, sends a powerful message that the next frontier in science and technology will be shaped by young women from Eswatini as much as from any other region," he said.

He said the mission was more than science, but about values. ShaktiSat stands for inclusion, social justice, and opportunity, ensuring that girls are not left behind in the technological revolutions of our time.

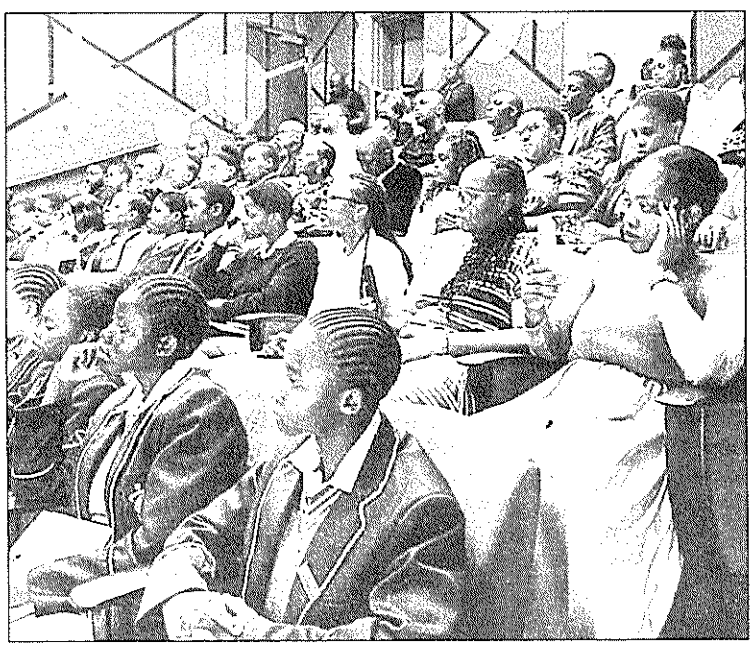
Prasad said by giving Eswatini's daughters hands on exposure to spacecraft systems, payload design and problem solving, the programme was nurturing confidence, leadership and teamwork.

"The initiative also reflects the deepening partnership between India and Eswatini, rooted in South–South cooperation. For decades, Eswatini professionals and students have benefitted from Indian scholarships and technical training.

This collaboration is 'literally reaching for the moon' by opening space science to the daughters of Eswatini," he added.

The high commissioner said for India, the mission carried symbolic weight: the name Shakti meant strength embodied the empowerment of girls across continents. For Eswatini, it was a chance to position its youth at the forefront of Africa's entry into outer space.

"May ShaktiSat be a beacon of hope to every girl who looks up at the night sky and dares to imagine her own place among the stars."



A section of the young women listening to speeches.