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## Pathways to Equality Advancing Gender Goals in the G20

Edited by

**Vaishali Nigam Sinha and  
Nitya Mohan Khemka**



WILEY



# **Pathways to Equality**

Advancing Gender  
Goals in the G20

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# FOREWORD



Looking at women as the leaders of today and tomorrow, on behalf of G20 India, this volume, *Pathways to Equality: Advancing Gender Goals in the G20*, demonstrates the incredible potential for a transformational change. The volume positions itself as a debate around gender equality and highlights stories of change. This timely publication maps new terrains for women in the 21st century and sheds light on the pathways that can lead us to a more inclusive and equal future.

Multidisciplinary in its approach, the chapters in this book examine various themes such as geopolitics, cross-collaborative partnerships, business, energy transition, sustainable development, health and nutrition, technology, social innovation, indigenous women, peace and security, and multilateral cooperation through the lens of gender equality. The book displays women as powerful agents of change.

Numerically, women constitute half of humanity, and their influence transfuses all elements of society, economy, and polity. Yet, they are subject to significant disadvantages due to deeply rooted patriarchal views, traditions, norms, and structures. Empowering women is not only smart economics but is essential to the overall development of families, communities, and countries. Even as countries are developing, gender disparities remain, which must be solved through the right policy measures, focused public action, and intervention.

In India, we recognise the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of our developmental journey. Women in India have been achieving new milestones every day and have contributed to the extensive growth of the country. If given equal opportunities as men, women have the potential to add US\$770 billion to the national GDP by 2025. Indian women have been at the forefront and have paved their way, from shaping the future of Indian businesses and startups to leading the public administration and being in decision-making positions. According to statistics, 1.4 million of the three million women appointed to local political positions worldwide are from India. India also ranks 18th in terms of political empowerment, which reflects our acceptance of female political leaders and how they can serve as role models for girls and women in society. To add, Indian women have played a crucial role in combating COVID-19, with approximately six million women leading India's mass mission to save lives during the pandemic.

As a nation, India has transitioned from women's development to women-led development. Over the years, the government of India has introduced multiple impactful schemes to accelerate gender parity, which has helped India transition and advocate for gender justice. Some of these schemes include the *Mudra Yojana Scheme*, through which collateral-free loans are given to small businesses, with ~70 percent of the beneficiaries being women (230 million PM Mudra loan beneficiaries were women); the *Vigyan Jyoti Scheme*, which encourages female students to major in STEM in higher education; *Kiran*, a woman-centric scientific programme that has provided women from 24 states and union territories in India with financial support; and *SERB Power*, a programme that promotes opportunities for women in exploratory research.

Various other efforts at the grassroots level include the establishment of a gender inclusion fund in India's National Education Policy; introducing *Mahila Shakti Kendras* to give women access to resources; and establishing other schemes like *Swadhar Greh*, *Swacch Vidyalaya Mission*, *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Kendras*, and *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna* to assure women's political, social, economic, and educational advancement.

It is these stories that have inspired me and millions of others to keep pushing forward towards gender mainstreaming. Throughout my own journey, I have witnessed women breaking barriers and carving their own paths to success. As Minister for Women and Child Development, I have continuously worked towards upscaling and strengthening women and child protection services in the country through various initiatives and reforms such as the *Stree Manoraksha Project* to end violence against women, introducing one-stop centres for the safety and security of women, and making child pornography a crime. Additionally, 81 percent of trainees in skill-development programmes are women, and the government has allocated INR 1,710,000 million for women-related schemes. Further, *PM Matru Vandana Yojana* paid INR 130,000 million to over 30 million pregnant women, making the health and empowerment of women a priority today and tomorrow.

As women take the centre-stage, India has identified five key areas under the G20 presidency, including women's leadership at the grassroots,

bridging the digital divide, education and skill development, women and girls as changemakers in climate resilience action, and female enterprise and prowess in the agriculture sector. Our country stands strong in advancing women's equality and is working relentlessly to close the gender gap and secure equal opportunities for women. In addition to leading by example, India may serve as an inspiration for other developed and developing countries to follow its path of progress and equality.

Other development goals—such as health, education, economic growth, financial inclusion, poverty, sanitation, and climate action—are inseparable from gender equality. As the advancement of women continues to play a significant role in our society, it is important to understand how they contribute towards better development outcomes for the next generation. This compendium recognises the political, economic, and sociocultural contexts and challenges facing women. It provides diversity in perspectives and weaves together various themes while maintaining women's empowerment at its core.

As the G20 platform is fostering communication and cooperation among the world's top economies, this volume will serve as a call to action, reminding us to commit to the cause of gender equality by tearing down obstacles and helping women achieve their full potential.

I strongly commend the initiative of the editors, Vaishali Nigam Sinha and Nitya Mohan Khemka, and Think20 (T20) to lead this effort and help us navigate the crucial role of women towards development, prosperity, collaboration, and resilience through this volume. Finally, I express my appreciation and gratitude towards all the leaders and contributors for their insights and thoughts. The compendium is a step in the right direction as we collectively chart a path towards women's upliftment.



**-Smriti Zubin Irani**  
*Minister of Women and Child Development, India*



# INTRODUCTION

India's G20 presidency presents a novel opportunity to revitalise the cause of gender equality at a global scale. As nations around the world attempt to recover from the dents of the COVID-19 pandemic, gender gaps continue to remain in several areas, including education, health, employment, and political representation. India's G20 presidency under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi has opened pathways to bring a colossal focus on women-led development. Identified as one of the key vision areas for the G20, there has been monumental shift from 'women's development' to 'women-led development', envisaging women as key drivers for growth and development rather than passive recipients of welfare measures.

The G20 recognises that gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also an economic one, and thus, women's participation in the economy is indispensable for sustainable economic growth. Despite efforts, women continue to remain underutilised in the global economy vis-à-vis their potential. Their active role in the mainstream will require promoting leadership right from the grassroots level and addressing areas such as education, employment, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, digitalisation, health and safety, and many others. In today's context, bridging the digital gender gap and increasing women's participation in STEM, AI, and future skills is of utmost importance. During its G20 presidency, India has taken transformative measures to leverage technology and find solutions that enable women to access the benefits that innovation in STEM and AI have to offer.

Prime Minister Modi has urged all the G20 nations to implement women-led development measures in urban and rural areas with a decentralised approach for greater representation. W20, the official engagement group for women's empowerment, was instituted in 2015. Under India's presidency, the W20 has prioritised key focus areas such as women's entrepreneurship, grassroots women's leadership, bridging the gendered digital divide, education and skill development, and building resilience to climate change to help bring a Global South perspective to the overall agenda.

Over the years, the G20 has taken several positive steps towards advancing gender equality. One of the most significant G20 initiatives has been *The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi)*, a partnership between the World Bank Group and several governments, including the G20 members, aiming to provide financial and technical assistance to women-led businesses in developing countries. Similarly, the G20 Alliance for the Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation (G20 EMPOWER) is working towards accelerating women's leadership and empowerment in the private sector. The G20 Gender Strategy and the G20 Women's Entrepreneurship Day initiatives have been instituted realising the crucial role women play in shaping development and economic growth.

However, the task is onerous, and while the G20's contributions have been significant, there is still a long way to go. Gender inequality remains a significant issue in many G20 countries, and women continue to face a multitude of barriers. This requires concerted efforts by stakeholders—including political leadership, policymakers, civil society, women's groups, community, and corporates at both central and regional levels across the G20 nations and more—to drive this transformation. Most importantly, men have a pivotal role to play in shaping gender discourse and equality. When women are empowered, the society is empowered. It becomes a significant mover in achieving inclusivity and holistic community development leading to equity and well-being across generations.

*Pathways to Equality: Advancing Gender Goals in the G20* is an effort in the direction of mainstreaming the discourse on gender issues, discussing impediments, stories of struggle and achievements of women from across G20 geographies. It is a 'thinking and doing' compendium for readers seeking to understand on how we can transform society by shining a new light on gender equality, presented as curated essays discussing gender inequality in the G20 countries and bringing together initiatives being taken to change the paradigm. This will definitely go a long way in inspiring and providing hope to women in the current and future generations.



I am very happy to note that the list of essay authors features eminent women leaders from various fields, and also men who have lent a voice to this cause. The idea of a collection of positive examples from the G20 countries on creative and pragmatic ways of challenging gender biases has resulted in a one-of-a-kind guiding resource for all looking to learn more on this subject and to do their bit to bridge the gender divide for all practical purposes.

I am certain this volume will be seen as a G20 empowerment tool on gender issues and will comprise of initiatives to move the needle towards Agenda 2030 and more impactful gender conversations in a multidimensional manner. This is an essential volume for both women and men to understand the issues around gender disparity, and how each of us can do our bit to reduce and eventually eliminate the current inequities in our lives.



**-Amitabh Kant**  
*G20 Sherpa for India*

A stack of several books is shown from a low angle, looking up. The books are of various colors, including dark blue, purple, and brown. The text "EDITORS' NOTE" is printed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the stack.

# EDITORS' NOTE



**I**t has been over a decade since the first G20 Summit was held in Washington DC. While much progress has been made on key global issues, gender inequality remains a significant concern in many countries. Women face unequal access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare services, and legal rights. Additionally, in many countries, women are often denied basic human rights such as the right to vote or participate in public life. As a result, there is an ever-widening gender gap between men and women across all areas of life.

Recent initiatives in the G20 countries have shown that governments are willing to act against this injustice and make strides towards addressing gender inequality. At the same time, there are still areas where more needs to be done to ensure gender equality is achieved across all sectors of society. Programmes that focus on the economic empowerment of women need to be expanded and better funded so that more women can gain access to the financial resources necessary for business ownership and other entrepreneurial endeavours. Furthermore, greater efforts should be made to change social attitudes about women's roles in society so that they are seen as equal partners rather than subordinates or second-class citizens.

*Pathways to Equality: Advancing Gender Goals in the G20* assesses a selection of critical issues faced by women in the G20 nations. It is a critical 'thinking and doing' volume for readers seeking to understand how we can transform society by moving the needle on gender equality. The curated essays discuss gender inequality in the G20 countries and explore current initiatives that are being taken to address this pressing issue. It features an all-star set of contributors from various fields, including eminent leaders from politics and society, philanthropists, policymakers, and thought leaders. The featured essays highlight the struggles but also offer up ideas and positive examples of how gender bias can be remedied in creative and practical ways.

## About the Volume

The compendium is organised by three broad themes—social and environmental (including progress on SDG-5, impacts of COVID-19, green energy transition, and climate change), political (such as the role of women in multilateral systems, peace, and security processes), and economic (which focuses on women’s financial inclusion and the role of women in technology and entrepreneurship).

This volume includes 13 chapters covering various overlapping themes, depicting the expertise and ideas of our well-known contributors. We are incredibly grateful to all our contributors: Klaus Schwab, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, Cherie Blair, Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, Baroness Mary Goudie, Ambassador Melanne Verwee, Estelle Clayton, Justin Worland, Kiran Shaw, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, Shelley Zalis, Rohini Nilekani, and Damilola Ogunbiyi. We are also immensely thankful to Smriti Zubin Irani and Amitabh Kant for their invaluable insights on the crucial subject of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Additionally, we have had the opportunity to compile a volume drawn from various fields of politics, business, and society. We have also had the opportunity to contribute to chapters highlighting the importance of participating as equals with equal values, the movement towards a gender-equal future, and the focus on pandemic-amplified gender vulnerabilities.

As we understand the different themes and perspectives through the lens of our contributors, we must realise that one of the crucial steps towards reducing gender inequality is to enhance economic opportunities for women. Numerous studies have shown that when women are economically empowered, societies prosper as a whole. By providing women with equal access to education and employment opportunities, the G20 countries can tap into the vast potential of their female workforce, contributing to economic growth and stability. However, to achieve this, programmes that promote financial literacy, vocational training, and business development among women need to be expanded and adequately supported. Providing women with the necessary skills and resources will

enable them to overcome barriers and become active contributors to their economies.

Beyond economic empowerment, changing attitudes about women's roles in society is paramount. Discriminatory norms and stereotypes continue to hinder progress towards gender equality. Societies must recognise and reject harmful gender biases that limit women's potential. Education plays a crucial role in this transformation, as it helps challenge deeply ingrained gender norms and promotes gender equality. Implementing comprehensive gender education programmes in schools, which focus on breaking down stereotypes and promoting equal opportunities, can help reshape societal perceptions and promote more inclusive attitudes towards women.

In addition to education, legislative reforms are essential to dismantle the systemic barriers that impede gender equality. Governments must take measures to ensure women have equal access to healthcare, legal rights, and political representation. This includes addressing gender-based violence and discrimination, ensuring reproductive rights, promoting equal pay for equal work, and creating legislation that safeguards women's rights in all areas of life. Laws and policies that protect women from discrimination and violence must be enacted, enforced, and regularly evaluated to ensure their effectiveness.

Although progress has been made in addressing gender inequality, there is still much work to be done. The G20 countries have shown a willingness to combat this injustice, but it is essential to expand and fund programmes that economically empower women, challenge social attitudes, and strengthen legal frameworks. By taking concrete actions to close the gender gap, the G20 countries can create societies where women have equal access to opportunities, decision-making power, and the ability to contribute fully to social, economic, and political development. Achieving gender equality is not only a matter of human rights but also a catalyst for sustainable development and prosperity for all.

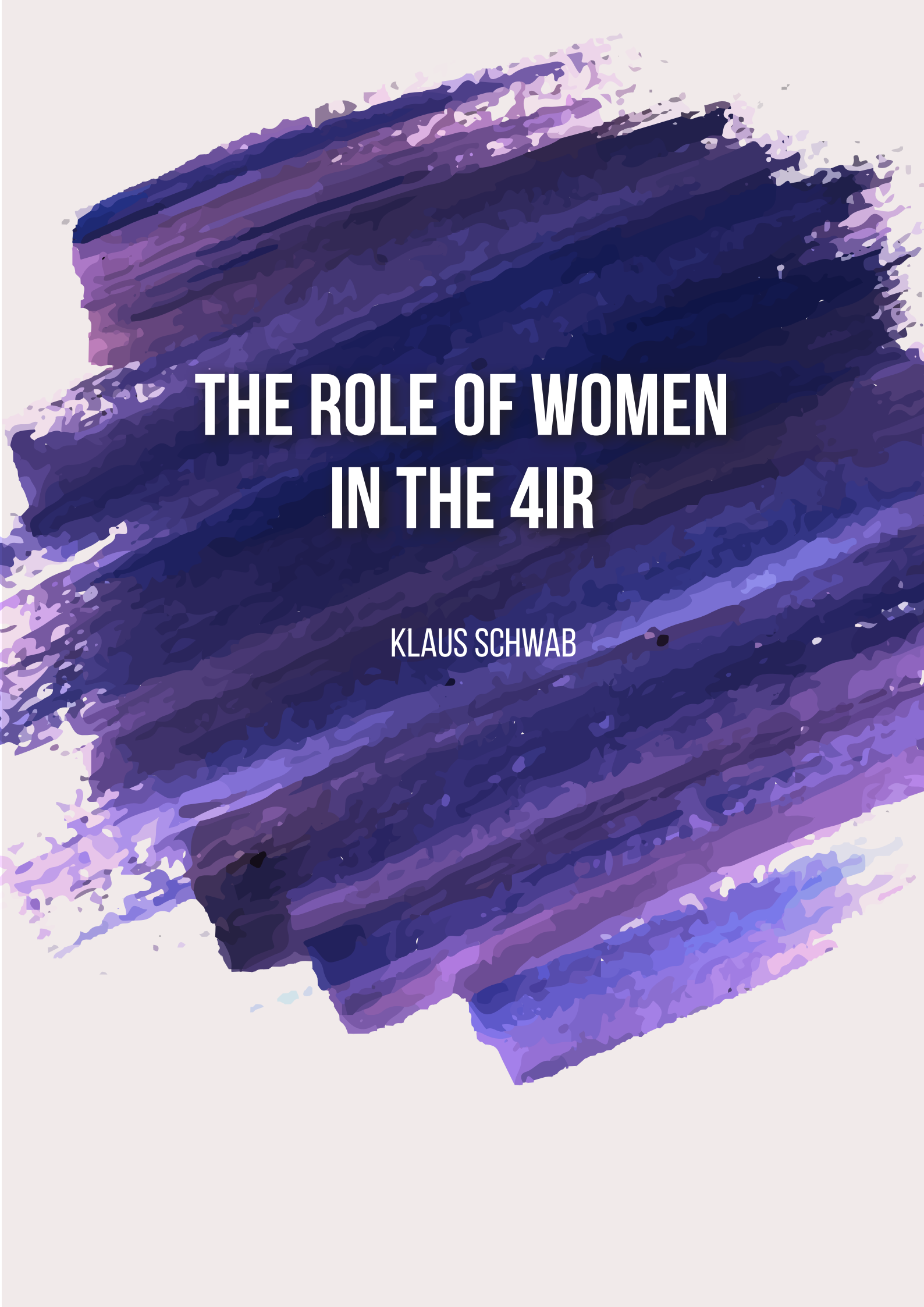
## Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of gender inequality persists in many countries, despite significant advancements in other global areas. Recent initiatives within the G20 countries demonstrate a willingness to address this injustice and make progress towards gender equality. By prioritising gender equality, the G20 nations can serve as beacons of progress, inspiring other countries to join the journey towards a more equitable and inclusive world for all.

While progress has been made in some G20 countries, it is essential to recognise that achieving gender equality requires a sustained commitment and collaboration among nations. Cooperation and sharing of best practices between countries can accelerate progress towards gender equality. The G20 nations have a unique opportunity to lead by example and establish frameworks that prioritise gender equality both domestically and internationally.

It is essential to recognise that achieving gender equality requires sustained commitment and collaboration across society. In this context, a narrative documenting the various struggles and opportunities women face—social, cultural, economic, political, and legal—is timely. This volume hopes to inform the G20 debates by traversing a broad array of subjects and stakeholders. By doing so, it hopes to make an important contribution towards understanding the contours of conversations on gender equality in the 21st century.

**-Vaishali Nigam Sinha and Nitya Mohan Khemka**



# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE 4IR

KLAUS SCHWAB

**H**uman society is currently facing four critical and overlapping transformations—geopolitical, driven by ongoing conflicts and waning trust in multilateral institutions and frameworks; economic, with the realignment of global supply chains and trade relations; technological, due to the merging of the digital and physical worlds and embedding of artificial intelligence (AI); and social, as people cope with massive challenges, such as inequality and large-scale climate events. In the face of such rapid and radical change, the world requires coordinated action from governments, businesses, and local actors to address common challenges, drive shared progress, and ensure that no one is left behind. In a world more complex, interconnected, and interdependent than ever before, our inability to come together to solve shared problems will shape our future trajectory and collective destiny for decades to come.

### **The Fourth Industrial Revolution and its Profound Impact**

Perhaps the most defining transformation of our times is the unprecedented technological revolution that is fusing the physical, digital, and biological worlds, and it is affecting all disciplines, economies, industries, societies, and governments. What makes this transformation distinct is the velocity, scope, and systems impact. It is moving at an exponential pace rather than a linear one. Recognising its profound impact on the way we live, work, and relate to one another, I coined the term the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in 2016 to help elevate global collaboration to understand the key technologies driving this revolution and ways to manage these changes for the greater good.

The 4IR is a sequel to the First Industrial Revolution (1765), which used water and the steam engine to mechanise production; the Second Industrial Revolution (1870), which advanced electric power (electricity, gas, and oil) for mass production; and the Third Industrial Revolution (1969), which used electronics and information technology to automate production. The 4IR builds on the Third Industrial Revolution, but, unlike the others, it is evolving at an exponential pace. With it, the 4IR



brings breakthroughs in AI, biotechnology, blockchain, robotics, genome editing, autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, the Internet of Things (IoT), and extended reality, among others. It has disrupted almost every industry in every country and sent transformations along entire systems of production, management, and governance.

Like the first three revolutions, the 4IR has the potential to raise global income levels, improve long-term supply-side efficiency, and ameliorate the quality of life for populations around the world. At the same time, the revolution could yield greater inequality and worsen the fragmentation of societies. Notwithstanding that future scenarios are neither inevitable nor predetermined, how society chooses to engage with technology will have a lasting impact on outcomes. Global leaders and stakeholders across the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society must come together to harness these changes and shape a better future, one in which technology empowers people rather than replaces them and innovation serves society rather than divides it.

### **The Critical Role of Women in the 4IR**

Digital technologies offer immense opportunities to address socio-economic challenges and to achieve the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Leveraging the full potential of human ingenuity will be critical to accelerating the volume and speed of innovation breakthroughs and to shaping them in a way that benefits the largest number of individuals possible. Given the historical and newly emerging gender gaps, women's full participation as innovators, policymakers, regulators, and consumers needs to be more intentionally built into the core of the unfolding 4IR. Doing so can both accelerate equitable solutions to humanity's biggest challenges and advance progress toward gender parity. However, the shift to digitalisation, if not strategically managed, can reinforce pre-existing inequalities.

Achieving the SDGs will certainly remain elusive until we close the digital gender gap. The UN theme for International Women's Day 2023, 'DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality', underscored

the immense potential of digital transformation to accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment. We all have the opportunity, and combined responsibility, to contribute to developing new frameworks that advance shared progress.

Basic digital literacy and digital connectivity are critical tools needed to engage in the digital economy. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in 2022, 63 percent of women globally used the internet compared to 69 percent of men (1). This proportion is reduced to 30 percent in many developing countries and to 20 percent in least developed countries. As per UN estimates, 259 million fewer women have access to the internet than men (2), and women are 12 percent less likely to own a mobile phone (3). Women's exclusion from the digital world has massive costs for the global economy. According to the UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2022 report, the lack of women's inclusion in the digital economy has shaved US\$1 trillion from the gross domestic product of low- and middle-income countries in the last decade, a loss that will grow to US\$1.5 trillion by 2025 without action (4).

Beyond closing the gap in basic digital access, efforts are needed to close multiple gender gaps in the labour market, in particular when it comes to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) roles at the core of the 4IR economy. The World Economic Forum has been measuring gender gaps since 2006 in the annual Global Gender Gap Report. Over 17 editions of the report, the Global Gender Gap Index has been tracking and comparing countries on progress on gender parity across four dimensions—economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment. Recent editions have further examined gender gaps at the industry level, particularly in workforce representation, senior leadership, and online skilling.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, at the current rate of progress, it will take the world 131 years to reach gender parity. However, it will take us 162 years to close the political empowerment gender gap and 169 years to close the economic participation gender gap (5). More parity in leadership roles in business and government, and



greater economic participation by women are critical levers to address the broader gender gaps.

Women remain underrepresented in key growth areas such as STEM and information and communication technology (ICT). Women make up just 29.2 percent of all STEM workers, a proportion that drops further across levels of seniority, and reaches 12.4 percent at the C-Suite level (6). Women further hold only two in every 10 science, engineering, and ICT jobs. Among the inventors listed on international patent applications globally in 2022, only 16.5 percent were women (7). While the hiring rates of women into senior leadership positions had been steadily increasing over the past decade, 2022 saw a downturn in this trend, which has been more pronounced for certain industries. The industries seeing the biggest reversals are technology and professional services, which in May 2023 were four percentage points below their pre-2022 trend in female leadership hiring rates (8).

While global gender parity in educational attainment is high, some divergences are emerging in the skills of the future. When it comes to enrolment in online skilling programmes, according to data by Coursera presented in this year's Global Gender Gap Report, parity is less than 50 percent even for top technology skills such as technological literacy, AI, and big data, and progress towards parity has been sluggish since 2015, the period of data availability. Early investment in girls' STEM skills will not only help break down gender stereotypes but also increase the female workforce in scientific fields.

Further, in this era driven by digital transformation, the power to turn visionary ideas into reality often hinges on financial resources. Women face systemic barriers to accessing capital as innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders in the 4IR, whether they are starting a new venture, scaling an existing business, or pursuing leadership roles in technology-driven industries. As per the latest Pitchbook data, the share of venture capital allocated to women founders in the US was 2.1 percent in 2022, and 16.1 percent when women co-founded a business with men (9). Governments and businesses must deploy a multifaceted approach towards equitable public and private investment practices to close this financing gap.

## Creating an Enabling Ecosystem to Accelerate Women's Participation

Actions addressed at closing the gender digital divide must aim to eliminate barriers to women's full, equal, and effective participation in the digital economy; increase women's and girls' access to ICTs and digital technologies; enhance digital literacy among women and girls; harness technological change to promote women's entrepreneurship and socioeconomic prosperity; eliminate cyberviolence; and address any potential negative impacts of digital technologies on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Critically, women also need to be involved in the creation of and decision-making around digital technologies. At the international level, responsible digital governance is crucial to ensuring that technological advancement is aligned with the common good rather than with profit optimisation.

Beyond the challenges in the digital world, women continue to face barriers in the analogue world that hamper the prospect of any durable progress. The issue of gender inequality must be tackled throughout the life cycle by looking at these existing challenges, including limited access to resources and education, difficulties in obtaining credit, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, cultural inhibitions, and gender stereotypes.

In addition, the support of governments and policymakers, at both national and global levels, will be crucial to improve the gender balance in the digital economy and to encourage more women into STEM and technology-based roles and careers. Policymakers can undertake a number of measures to accelerate the participation of women—mainstreaming a gender perspective in the conceptualisation, development, and implementation of digital technologies and related policies; investing in boosting national capacity to produce gender-disaggregated data for these fields, which is key to designing conducive policies; improving gender representation in national system of innovation institutions; implementing targeted policies to bring and retain women and girls into the digital space and targeted support to women researchers and techno-entrepreneurs; investing in training programmes that help women

develop critical skills; and democratising technology and digital jobs and leadership roles. We also need the invaluable support of corporates and the private sector to enforce high standards of safe and equitable working conditions, strengthen baseline skills among women at scale, and ensure access to future-oriented employment opportunities for women in the digital and technology sectors. Greater and more sustained investments are required to increase women and girls' access to digital literacy and familiarity with technology. This encompasses skills that enable both the development and direct use of technologies, such as good comprehension of emerging technologies and their applications, as well as knowledge of digital privacy and security.

The World Economic Forum is complementing the measurement of gender gaps with a growing portfolio of action initiatives and leadership communities dedicated to accelerating progress. To turn insights into concrete action and national progress, the Forum has developed the Gender Parity Accelerator model for public-private collaboration. These accelerators have been convened in 14 countries across three regions. All country accelerators, along with knowledge partner countries demonstrating global leadership in closing gender gaps, are part of a wider ecosystem, the Global Learning Network, that facilitates the exchange of insights and experiences through the Forum's platform. Focusing on corporate action, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lighthouse Programme brings together a cross-industry group of organisations taking action to drive better and faster outcomes through CEO leadership and knowledge-sharing on initiatives that have achieved significant, quantifiable, and sustained impact for women and other underrepresented groups.


## **Conclusion**

Unlocking women's potential in the digital economy calls for a multifaceted approach, necessitating collaboration among governments, businesses, and civil society. This approach should aim to provide women with access to digital resources, education, skills, and financial support. By investing in women's participation in the digital economy, we can create a more inclusive and equitable global economy that benefits everyone.

To achieve the future we want, we must reassert human agency over technology and adopt a human-centric approach to digitalisation. The 4IR—and the mobility, flexibility, and adaptability it affords—has the potential to shape a more equal, just, and sustainable future for humankind than in the past. We must collaborate to ensure that we harness the full potential of the 4IR for the collective good of people the world over, women included.

## Endnotes

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**GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S  
EMPOWERMENT: HOW SAUDI  
ARABIA IS OVERCOMING  
BARRIERS TO PROGRESS**

**PRINCESS REEMA BINT BANDAR AL SAUD**

**W**hat is the real barrier to gender equality, greater equity, inclusion, and diversity? Perhaps it is the fact that we still must ask that very question in the first place.

As long as we are still pointing to the ‘first’ woman—the first woman president, the first woman to manage a major central bank, the first to lead an international organisation, or the first woman ambassador—gender equity remains a direction, but not yet our destination. While all progress matters and every step forward is important, equally important is our commitment to never pausing or resting, never being satisfied, and never accepting anything less than true equity. This is because gender equity is not a selfish goal or objective, but rather a necessity and an essential means for our continued progress as strong and healthy families, communities, and nations. It is the only way we can ensure that social and economic global advancement is true advancement for everyone.

It is essential that we rally now to invest in women’s empowerment to make the progress needed to achieve the goals outlined by the United Nations Development Programme in its Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025. The data shows that we are falling back—not moving forward—as global crises, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, were especially detrimental to women in terms of income, safety, education, and health; for instance, globally, women lost an estimated US\$800 billion in income in 2020 due to the pandemic (1). The longer we take to reverse this trend, the more it will cost us all. In developing nations, women still need greater access to the basics—education, legal protections, financing, and changing mindsets that create barriers to progress. In this, women need more cooperation, partnerships, and investments to achieve gender equality, including through increased global and national funding, which are essential to correct the course and place gender equality back on track.



## Gender and the Financial Inclusion Gap

One critically important area that we must focus on is the role that education, training, and financial literacy can play in promoting gender inclusion. To truly find the path to inclusivity, women need the knowledge and skills to successfully enter the workforce and be able to make informed decisions about financial matters, such as managing money, investing, and budgeting, once they have begun a career. It is essential for everyone to have some level of financial literacy, but it is particularly important for women, who have historically been excluded from financial decision-making and who still face many barriers to achieving financial independence.

Education and training can help level the playing field, give women a more equal footing in the workplace, and reduce the gender wealth gap. It can also give women greater control over their own financial lives, enabling them to participate more fully in economic decision-making within their families and communities. Education and training are about having real-life skills. It is about building confidence and preparing women to take their rightful place in society as full participants. By investing in women's education and training programmes, as well as addressing gender equity more broadly through changes to laws and regulations, we can shift cultural attitudes and norms around gender and employment.

When women can participate in the workforce and make their own financial decisions, it marks a huge step toward making and controlling so many other life choices and leveling the social and economic playing field that has often been tilted against women's progress and advancement. Historically, women have been excluded from many areas of economic life, including education, employment, and financial decision-making. As a result, women have often been at a disadvantage when it comes to achieving financial independence and security. For example, women have traditionally been paid less than men for the same work and are more likely to work part-time or in low-paying jobs. Women have also been less likely to have access to credit or investment opportunities, and have often been excluded from financial decision-making within their families or communities.

## Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia: The Vision 2030 Agenda

Despite some progress across many parts of the world in recent decades, gender inequality remains a significant issue. Women still face many barriers to economic participation, including discrimination in the workplace, lack of access to education and training, and limited opportunities for entrepreneurship. In addition, women are more likely than men to experience poverty and to live in households with low levels of financial literacy.

I have had the privilege to live through a time of profound and historic change for women in Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom's Vision 2030 agenda, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, is not only a programme to diversify and strengthen the nation's economy, but also one to empower women and make gender equity, diversity, and inclusion a driving force in the nation's plans for the future. This is why Vision 2030 is focused on ensuring that Saudi women have the opportunity to not just aspire, but become vital contributors to the nation's economic future. Just seven years into Vision 2030, goals are already being met, milestones are already being achieved, and the pace of progress continues forward at an unprecedented speed. Indeed, in 2020, the World Bank ranked Saudi Arabia as top reformer in terms of economic and social progress for women among 190 economies (2).

Vision 2030 has focused on developing women's talents, investing in their productive capabilities, and enabling them to strengthen their future by becoming essential participants in the development of Saudi society and economy. For example, currently, in the Kingdom:

- More women receive advanced degrees than men (3)
- More women are enrolling in STEM education (4)
- More than 40 percent of small- and mid-sized startup companies are now owned by women (5)
- Women now enjoy equal pay, something that should be universal (6)



That is the story of the new and developing Saudi Arabia, a story of greater equality and inclusiveness. While there is still work to be done, the recent progress for women, the engagement of women in the workforce, and the social and cultural opportunities being created for women are truly profound.

To continue that progress and overturn the decades of systemic social, cultural, and economic inequity, it is not enough just to simply implement new laws and regulations. If we are to permanently change deeply held institutional bias and behaviour—in the Arab world, in the G20 member states, and beyond—new rules alone are not sufficient, and must be complemented by new thinking and a change in attitude. Only with a new mindset and a new shared obligation of global citizenship that prioritises the importance of building more equitable and tolerant societies, can we together transform and overcome our longstanding inequalities.

### **Women's Financial Inclusion: A Pathway to Women's Economic Empowerment**

To achieve gender equity, our efforts must also be institutional and collective. In the Kingdom, under Vision 2030, we have implemented the Women Empowerment Initiative in our annual budget, which is in line with the International Monetary Fund's women budgeting approach (7). This initiative is a comprehensive approach for policies and actions that empower Saudi women by facilitating their access to available resources, enabling women to grow and prosper, and reducing the gap between men and women. The initiative aims to achieve this in a manner that contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals to promote economic growth in a strong, sustainable, and balanced way.

The Women Empowerment Initiative is an essential component of the Kingdom's efforts towards women's empowerment, as it offers the government a mechanism to coordinate and align policies, from a budget perspective, in a manner that ensures the efficient allocation of appropriate resources. It also helps set long-term objectives and

measurable goals in alignment with all relevant stakeholders to maintain the momentum of our government-wide approach for this issue.

This comprehensive institutional approach is what has enabled the Kingdom to make great advancements towards women's empowerment and gender equality in such a short time. After removing the initial hurdles that have excluded women from economic participation, the Kingdom, under Vision 2030, identified a number of strategic objectives for relevant government entities to work towards empowerment and equality, as well as tactical objectives that include partnerships with the private sector and NGOs. On a macro level, our objectives focus on increasing women's participation in the labour market and empowering women to assume leadership positions. To achieve these goals, numerous programmes and initiatives have been established across government entities, both civilian and military. For example, banks, financial institutions, and non-profit organisations now routinely provide targeted financial education programmes and support for women. The Social Development Bank, in partnership with Saudi NGOs, trains young women for freelance jobs in a number of fields such as e-marketing, graphic design, photography, and video editing. This is done through a set of training activities, specialised consultations, and logistical and marketing services, in addition to providing the opportunities to obtain financing from the Social Development Bank. The government has also established women-only business incubators and accelerators with the aim of encouraging female entrepreneurship.

The Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, as part of its Vision 2030 initiatives, has launched several programmes to support women empowerment. This includes a training programme targeting women leaders and employees who are expected to obtain leadership positions in various sectors with the aim of providing the environment and tools they need to enrich their leadership skills and become role models for other young women. This initiative also provides training programmes targeting unemployed women. The programme consists of on-the-job training alongside a training module by specialised entities. Upon completion of the training, the individual obtains a certification, and the participating companies are incentivised in various ways to

provide job opportunities (8). This initiative alone aims to train and employ 100,000 women.

Saudi efforts to empower women have been highly successful, with women's participation in the workforce climbing from 17 percent in 2017 to 36 percent in 2022, well above and ahead of the 31.4 percent target rate by 2025 (9).

But, under Vision 2030, it is not just about providing women with more opportunities to work, it is also about preparing them to work. This includes support for transportation and childcare as well as job training to assist women in their transition into the workplace. Skills that not only benefit them at work, but anywhere, even if they eventually choose not to work.

Financial literacy, childcare, women's health, and the integration of women throughout all sectors, across all areas of public service and private sector work are challenges that all women face in almost every society. We must eliminate these barriers if we want to ensure strong workforce inclusion and participation.

## **Gender Equity: A Holistic Approach**

The Kingdom has been successful in addressing one of the most critical challenges of our times through a deliberate, comprehensive, and sustainable whole-of-government approach in partnership with the private sector and civil society.

Our experience has taught us the importance of institutionalising programmes that aim to promote gender inclusion and equality, and tailoring these efforts to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by women, such as the pay and wealth gaps and the lack of access to credit and investment opportunities.

An institutional, whole-of-government approach has also allowed us to integrate specific programmes into broader initiatives aimed at promoting

gender inclusion and equality. For example, financial literacy can be included as part of initiatives aimed at promoting women's education, employment, and entrepreneurship. By combining specific programmes with other initiatives aimed at promoting gender inclusion and equality, these programmes can have a greater impact and help to address multiple aspects of gender inequality.

The empowerment of women can reflect a society's development. Indeed, the advancement of women is vital and a necessity for a nation's economic and social development. In Saudi Arabia, women are among the most important elements of human resources, as they constitute more than 50 percent of the total number of graduates (10). As the Crown Prince has said, "You can't move forward and leave half your country behind." As a result, the Saudi government has devoted great attention to women within the Vision 2030 reform agenda to enhance their role in all aspects of life. It has been a vital and indispensable approach to advance development, enhance prosperity, and improve the prospects of this generation and those to come. Not long ago, Saudi Arabia stood out as a place where women's rights and economic participation lagged well behind the rest of the world. Today, the Kingdom is becoming a model for how a focused, dedicated, and multifaceted public/private approach can rapidly change the role of women in society. We hope the world is watching and can benefit from our efforts.

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**NAVIGATING THE PATH TO PEACE:  
EXPLORING THE MULTIFACETED  
DIMENSIONS OF THE WOMEN,  
PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA**

**RUCHIRA KAMBOJ**



**A**s a senior diplomat with a fair exposure to multilateralism, I have come to appreciate the indispensable role that women play in building sustainable peace. I do believe that the involvement of women in peace and security is not merely a matter of inclusivity, it is a strategic imperative. Their unique perspectives, skills, and experiences bring an invaluable contribution to conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 unequivocally affirms that there can be no lasting peace without the equal participation and full involvement of women in all spheres of society. This recognition is indisputable and reinforces the need to harness the transformative power of women's engagement for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

The women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda emerged from UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Adopted in 2000, the agenda acknowledges that women are not just victims of conflict but also agents of change. Women have long been at the forefront of peace movements, advocating for dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion. Their inclusion in peacebuilding processes enhances the effectiveness and legitimacy of these efforts. By amplifying women's voices, empowering them as decision-makers, and addressing the unique challenges they face, their immense potential in forging sustainable peace can indeed be unlocked.

The WPS agenda recognises that achieving gender equality is essential for preventing conflict and building peaceful societies. By addressing the root causes of gender-based violence, unequal access to resources, and social marginalisation, conditions conducive to peace can be created. Empowering women economically, socially, and politically not only promotes justice but also reduces the likelihood of violence and instability.

Inclusive peace processes that actively involve women lead to more comprehensive and durable outcomes. Studies consistently demonstrate that when women participate in peace negotiations, agreements are more likely to include provisions addressing gender-specific issues and promoting gender equality. Women's participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 percent and lasting

at least 15 years by 35 percent. Moreover, when women's groups are not involved at all, the chances of arriving at an agreement are significantly low (1). However, despite this evidence, women make up only a small portion of official peace procedures. Between 1990 and 2019, of 1,860 peace agreements, only 20 percent mentioned girls, women, and gender. Additionally, the average percentage of female negotiators was only 13 percent (2). These numbers showcase the struggle to include women, despite their demonstrated contributions and potential.

Women have often prioritised factors like human security, social cohesion, and the needs of marginalised communities, all crucial perspectives. It is time we recognise the role of women in important aspects of peace accords that can be missed otherwise.

Conflict disproportionately affects women and girls, making their protection a paramount concern. The WPS agenda emphasises the prevention of gender-based violence, ensuring access to justice for survivors, and providing support services for their recovery and reintegration. By promoting a culture of accountability, strengthening legal frameworks, and enhancing the capacity of security forces to address gender-based violence, a safer environment can be created for women and girls caught in the middle of conflict.

Post-conflict reconstruction offers a unique opportunity to transform societies, and women are impacted directly by such initiatives. It is crucial for women to participate in these decision-making processes so that their demands and concerns are considered. In countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, women's organisations were successful in requesting specific funding to assist women and encourage their involvement in reconstruction. Similarly, in Iraq, women's activism resulted in the allocation of funds for women's empowerment from the assistance package authorised by the US Congress (3).

The WPS agenda recognises the importance of integrating a gender perspective into recovery and development efforts. By investing in women's education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, inclusive societies can be fostered that are more resilient, prosperous, and at



peace. Moreover, involving women in decision-making processes regarding resource allocation and policy formulation ensures that their needs and priorities are reflected in the rebuilding of their communities.

The WPS agenda serves as a critical framework for advancing global peace and security. It is a call to action to recognise and harness the potential of women as catalysts for change. Women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding, the prevention of gender-based violence, the protection of women and girls, and the promotion of gender equality are not only moral imperatives but also strategic necessities.

Sustainable peace can only be achieved by using inclusive and gender-responsive approaches. It is the responsibility of governments, international organisations, civil society, and individuals to prioritise the implementation of the WPS agenda. This means ensuring that women's rights, experiences, and contributions are central to all efforts related to peace and security.

Most G20 countries have already adopted national action plans on WPS. During its G20 presidency, India has worked closely with Women 20 (W20), an official G20 engagement group. The purpose of the W20 is to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into G20 discussions and are reflected in the G20 leaders' declaration. This should lead to policies and commitments that promote gender equality and support women's economic empowerment.

The WPS agenda is the road towards sustainable peace and creates a society that is inclusive, diverse, and truly representative. All nations must support the WPS agenda, particularly developing powers like India. India has been at the forefront of promoting gender equality and has had numerous women role models. Starting from when women played a crucial role in almost every facet of India's battle for independence to having one of the first woman heads of government globally, India's ambitions and action has set an example. India has not only been appreciated for its efforts by the international community, but has the potential of championing the global WPS agenda.

India is deeply committed to enhancing the role of women in UN peacekeeping operations and efforts, and recognises their invaluable contributions to fostering peace and stability. To ensure effective implementation, India has prioritised providing adequate training to peacekeepers and promoting women's leadership in peace processes. In 2007, India made history by deploying the world's first-ever all-female Formed Police Unit for UN peacekeeping in Liberia. This unit served for a decade and set an example for the women in the country through their efforts. The initiative had a positive impact on Liberian society; the number of women applying to join the Liberia National Police quadrupled, going from ~120 to 350 within two months. Further, female representation increased from 10 percent to 17 percent in the Liberian security services (4).

Building upon this milestone, India sent a female engagement team to the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (or MONUSCO) as a rapidly deployable battalion (5). Additionally, India deployed an all-women's platoon in the peacekeeping mission in Abyei, South Sudan, in early 2023 (6). These initiatives highlight India's unwavering belief in the immense potential of women to create a safer and more prosperous world for all.

India unequivocally supports the zero-tolerance approach of the UN Secretary-General towards sexual exploitation and abuse. As a testament to its commitment, India holds the distinction of being the first country to contribute to the Secretary-General's Trust Fund for Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (7). Additionally, in 2017, India signed the voluntary compact on sexual exploitation and abuse with the Secretary-General (8). Furthermore, the Indian prime minister has joined the esteemed 'Circle of Leadership' on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in UN operations. These actions reflect India's unwavering support for eradicating such misconduct and ensuring the safety and dignity of all individuals.

India aims to inspire and encourage other nations to embrace the meaningful inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations. It recognises that women bring unique perspectives, skills, and experiences that

are crucial for effective conflict resolution and sustainable peace. By promoting gender equality and empowering women in peacekeeping, India is striving to make a lasting impact on global security and peace.

India remains dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda and will continue working to ensure that women play a vital role in shaping a more secure and prosperous future for everyone.

### **Empowering Women for Lasting Peace**

The effort should be to continue working together to dismantle barriers, challenge gender stereotypes, and create enabling environments that empower women to actively participate in peacebuilding processes. This requires a collective commitment to invest in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women, as well as promote their leadership and decision-making roles at all levels of society.


Furthermore, it is essential to foster partnerships between governments, civil society organisations, and international actors to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and mobilise resources for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Collaboration and coordination are key to ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive approach to women's empowerment and peacebuilding.

As we strive for a world free from conflict and filled with lasting peace, we must acknowledge that women's rights are inseparable from human rights and that their inclusion is not optional but imperative. The WPS agenda provides a roadmap for transformative change, urging us to recognise and harness the potential of women as agents of peace and catalysts for sustainable development. We must commit ourselves fully to the implementation of the WPS agenda. By upholding women's rights, promoting gender equality, and ensuring their meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security, we can forge a future where peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a reality that thrives on inclusivity, justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of all. In this shared vision, women are catalysts for change, nurturing resilient

communities, championing social justice, and fostering a dialogue that transcends divisions. There cannot be true progress unless this 50 percent of humanity is given a chance to thrive in our world of constant acceleration and boundless growth.

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**BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING  
BUSINESSES: CATALYSING  
WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
IN THE G20**

**CHERIE BLAIR**

**W**omen the world over have the appetite, ambition, and potential to run their own lives and enterprises and to be leaders in commerce in their communities and nations. But many are prevented from flourishing while inequality holds them back.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right. It is explicitly noted in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is the fifth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Millions of women and girls the world over live disadvantaged lives, lacking autonomy, resources, and decision-making power simply because of their gender. At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum estimates it will take more than 150 years to close the economic gender gap (1).

When it comes to tackling the world's biggest challenges, like those on the agenda at the G20, there is hardly an area that is not positively impacted when women can thrive as business owners. Women entrepreneurs innovate and create jobs. They support better education, health, life outcomes, and choices for their children. They work towards solving social and community issues. They advocate for women's rights.

### **Opportunity to Create Sustainable Change**

Despite mountains of evidence of the importance of women entrepreneurs, their contributions are still terribly under-recognised and undervalued by the global community. The marginalisation and exclusion of women in business ownership is a human rights issue and remains largely unaddressed.

About 193 countries have signed up and committed to the SDGs. Yet, regressive laws, policies, and practices—old and new—continue to unfairly restrict women entrepreneurs. The World Bank's *2023 Women, Business, and the Law* report found that just 14 countries give women the same economic rights as men in the eyes of the law (2). This means that 176 economies maintain legal barriers that prevent women's full economic participation.



The Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (the Foundation) works with women entrepreneurs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to fight for women's economic justice, a central tenet of gender equality. Together with partners around the world, the Foundation works with women so they can start, sustain, and grow successful enterprises. We see every day the incredible ripple effect of positive impacts that women create when they are able to do so. Damilola Asaleye is one such example. She is revolutionising energy in Nigeria through her company Ashdam Solar, which provides affordable access to clean energy. In this way, Asaleye is both tackling energy poverty and paving the way for a more sustainable future. Thanks to her success, she has also been able to set up an academy where she teaches other Nigerian women and girls to be leaders in technology and renewable energy. To share her words, "I see myself contributing to changing the world in a positive way...I see my work in trying to reduce energy poverty as very critical" (3).

### **Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship is a Cause and Consequence of Inequality**

The global gender gap in entrepreneurship is multifaceted, pervasive, and far-reaching. Worldwide, gender inequity is deeply ingrained in systems and institutions, including education, healthcare, employment, and governance. It intersects with factors like ethnicity, nationality, disability, class, caste, and sexuality. It is deeply interlinked with issues such as health, education, violence, climate change, and conflict. It manifests in multifarious ways that affect every facet of women's lives. It must, as such, be holistically understood and dealt with.

Gender bias and stereotyping is a root cause of the gender gap in entrepreneurship. The Foundation's own research into gender stereotypes, surveying 221 women entrepreneurs across 42 LMICs, found almost all (96 percent) of the women had directly experienced gender stereotypes in their lives (4). More than six in 10 (61 percent) believe that gender stereotypes impact their business growth, and almost half (49 percent) said they affect profitability (5). About 55 percent also felt that institutions relevant for entrepreneurs in their countries are biased in favour of men (6).

The intersection between experiences of gender stereotypes and the ability of women entrepreneurs to access finance is stark. Over a third (36 percent) of women entrepreneurs surveyed by the Foundation reported a lack of access to finance as the main challenge they faced as an entrepreneur—by far the most common (7). Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of women also reported experiencing gender stereotypes or discriminatory remarks whilst trying to access finance for their business (8). One woman entrepreneur from Indonesia told the Foundation that “[an] angel investor was telling me that he has doubts on [sic] investing in woman founders because usually women are not that good at managing business” (9). It is abundantly clear that tackling gender stereotypes in business is urgent.

These women’s experiences of the world are qualified by new United Nations Development Programme data that shows gender biases to do with work remain deeply entrenched; 40 percent of people worldwide still believe men make better business executives than women (10). Furthermore, the data reveals that there has been no improvement in biases against women in a decade (11).

Despite great gains in women’s skills and education, an enormous gender income gap persists. The World Economic Forum reports that “stark income gaps continue to hinder economic gender parity, with almost half (48.1 percent) of the overall earned income gap yet to close” (12). Furthermore, the International Finance Corporation indicates that women-led businesses have an unmet demand for credit of up to US\$1.7 trillion (13). These gaps in income and financing are directly fed by gender stereotypes and bias, which stymie women’s access to markets, investments, credit, and opportunities.

The baseless nature of gender bias and stereotypes is underscored by substantial data that shows that women business owners are stronger savers than men, more responsible borrowers, and more calculated risk-takers. For example, research from Boston Consulting Group and MassChallenge, analysing data from 250 startups that had received investment, found that for every dollar of funding, women-founded business generated 78 cents compared to 31 cents for those founded by men (14).



Despite considerable evidence of the benefits of investing in women entrepreneurs, gender bias remains hard-baked into business finance at every level. Banks often require assets and collateral that women are much less likely to have, and create products that favour typically male-led industries or types of businesses. Gendered disparities in education and skills acquisition affect women's financial literacy levels. Cultural assumptions about businesswomen limit outreach to potential women clients. Gender-biased credit scoring and gender stereotyping in investment evaluations is rife. Furthermore, 104 economies still lack a legal provision that expressly prohibits gender-based discrimination in access to credit (15).

What this means is that hundreds of millions of women do not have equal access to the types of financial services—loans, credit cards, bank accounts—that will enable them to become entrepreneurs. Globally, more than 70 percent of women-owned formal small and medium enterprises have inadequate or no access to financial services, and worldwide, a US\$287 billion gap in financing exists for formal, women-owned small businesses (16).

Unequal distribution of unpaid care work is one of the most critical factors affecting women's entrepreneurship, and is strongly shaped by gender stereotypes. These affect the views and values relating to care work and contribute to the gendered division of care at the household, community, and global levels. This distribution forms a critical barrier for women entrepreneurs who must juggle looking after children and other family members and carrying out domestic duties with running a business. This is compounded by women's lack of access to finance, which sees them having to invest their own money into their businesses—by far the most common source of financial investment for women-owned businesses in LMICs—leaving them with less money to pay for childcare and domestic support (17).

It is estimated that unpaid care work adds US\$10.8 trillion to the global economy each year, equivalent to 9 percent of global GDP, but because this work is disproportionately carried out by women and girls, it is chronically undervalued (18).

In late 2022, the Foundation surveyed over 700 women entrepreneurs across nearly 80 countries. Half of these women (49 percent) said their unpaid care workload had increased since the beginning of the pandemic, with 41 percent now carrying out four or more hours of unpaid care work each day (19). Worryingly, almost one in five (19 percent) say that this has undermined the performance or limited the growth of their business (20).

Odunayo Anyibuofu, the founder of a clothing company in Nigeria, recently told the Foundation, “The challenge as a woman in this business is the family care. I need to take care of my girls. I home school them because of finance. And right now, I am the only one doing everything” (21).

### **Action Can, and Must, be Taken**

That half of the world is held back from starting, growing, or sustaining their business because of their gender is a travesty of human rights. It also means that we are collectively hugely missing out on the potential of women’s talents and ideas. Jobs are going uncreated, ideas unrealised, services unprovided. We are missing out on global innovation, problem-solving, and economic growth.

It should be clear to all the G20 member states that in our shared vision of a world of democracy, freedom, justice, prosperity, and progress—a world that works for everyone—this is an unacceptable state of affairs.

Evidently, tackling discrimination related to entrepreneurship requires hard work in multiple areas. Policymakers and governments must first and foremost listen to women entrepreneurs themselves, ensuring that their voices are firmly heard in any conversations to do with them, and engage directly with women-centred and feminist organisations.

It is up to governments to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women as business owners. Policy and legislation—if implemented and measured effectively—can provide a structured and

systematic approach to creating lasting and widespread change for gender justice. The power of public campaigns targeting the elimination of gender stereotypes should also not be underestimated. Crucially, women's right to equality must be enshrined in law, and discriminatory laws, regulations, and practices must be ended. For example, in 2021, Egypt, Gabon, and Sierra Leone all made access to credit easier for women by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in financial services (22).

Institutions and companies must be held to account regarding gender discrimination and resources, and support must be directed effectively to women and women-centred initiatives. Societal norms and perspectives must be shifted to spearhead change at the personal, community, and societal levels. Furthermore, gender disaggregation of data relating to business ownership is a must. After all, what gets measured gets addressed.

Strong partnership between public institutions, the private sector, and development partners is a highly effective way to challenge gender inequality in entrepreneurship through programming and advocacy. Many organisations are already doing the work, but are chronically underfunded. These programmes help to increase business management skills and financial literacy, support women to better manage the work-life balance, grow women's business networks, and strengthen confidence and leadership skills. Their fantastic outcomes and the ripple effects of impact that these generate are well-demonstrated.

Similar investment from governments is required in affordable, high-quality, and accessible care and social services to enable women to run their businesses. Governments must recognise, redistribute, and reduce the unpaid care work disproportionately impacting women, and ensure that national macroeconomic policies address the gender inequalities in unpaid care and domestic responsibilities.

Crucially, however, one of the smartest things that governments can do is to invest in women-owned businesses. Governments must provide funding that is specifically designed with and for women entrepreneurs, that suits their needs and situations, so that they and their businesses


can thrive, and that communities and societies can reap the fantastic resulting benefits.

It is no exaggeration to say that women entrepreneurs have the power to change the world. It is high time for decision-makers to value and prioritise them.

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# **WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM**

MARIA FERNANDA ESPINOSA GARCÉS



**A**chieving gender equality is a central tenet of international and national development frameworks. Despite some advancement, significant hurdles persist. The *Global Gender Gap Report 2022* estimates full parity may be over 132 years away, given the current pace (1). Women worldwide grapple with discrimination, violence, and pay disparities, with scant representation in leadership and decision-making.

Gender equality is a human right and is also essential for a peaceful, prosperous, sustainable world. Thus, we must actively tackle these disparities and place women and girls at the heart of sustainable development strategies. Such an approach requires gender-targeted interventions that recognise women as potent catalysts for change, rather than merely passive victims or beneficiaries. The shift from women's development to women-led development (WLD), proposed by India as a key pillar for the G20 agenda, transitions women from victims or recipients to agents of societal transformations.

WLD revolves around power redistribution and equal opportunities, spanning access to quality education and resources. It includes forming policy, institutional, and political frameworks that elevate women's contributions to social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. Women, about 50 percent of the global population, are neither a minority nor inherently vulnerable. Research underscores the economic growth spurred by women's equal access to resources, education, and decision-making opportunities (2). Moreover, women's leadership across sectors brings novel perspectives, leading to more inclusive development policies and programmes.

### **Critical Points of Action for Women-Led Development**

To foster WLD, six crucial transitions are necessary. These are not only key to achieving gender equality, but also for cultivating sustainable and equitable societies.

## 1. Reshaping the Care Economy

The feminised care sector, growing in demand globally, needs a radical overhaul. Frequently unrecognised and unpaid, women's care work, despite contributing US\$3 trillion annually to global health (3), is undervalued. Women fill 70 percent of health roles, holding only 25 percent of leadership positions (4), and earning less than 24 percent than their male counterparts (5). To remedy this, the visibility and value of care work must be enhanced. The care economy is the economy of the future because there is no substitute for human care, and it should be based on professional skills, be well remunerated, and defeminised.

## 2. Closing the Digital Divide

Bridging the gender digital gap is integral to WLD. Women, especially in impoverished countries and rural areas (6), are digitally marginalised. With over 90 percent of jobs having a digital component in the next decade (7), this divide constrains women's workforce participation. Actions need to be taken swiftly. Governments must strive to undertake a global digital inclusion initiative to provide affordable and accessible technology. Normative efforts are also required to prevent and combat gender-based violence perpetrated through digital means, including social media platforms. Swift action is needed: affordable, accessible technology provision; and prevention and combat of digital gender-based violence. India's promotion of digital financial inclusion via the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) demonstrates the potential impact. UPI accounted for over 40 percent of the world's real-time payment transactions, and the opening of 460 million new bank accounts, making India a global leader in financial inclusion (8).

## 3. Ensuring Access to Quality Education

Obstacles such as financial limitations, child marriage, domestic responsibilities, gender-based violence, climate, conflict, and human trafficking limit girls' education access. Post-pandemic, 11 million girls did not return to school, adding to 118.5 million girls already lacking



education access worldwide (9). In the realm of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), women constitute only 19.9 percent students (10). Investment in girls' education is paramount, not only to bolster literacy rates but also to enhance their future earning potential. It is worth noting that each additional year of schooling can boost a girl's future earnings by up to 20 percent (11).

#### 4. Promoting Women in the Labour Force and Financing for Women

Job losses during COVID-19 disproportionately affected women, with higher female-owned business closure rates (12). Women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies, face limited access to finance and legal support. Only 68 percent of women in developing economies access the formal financial system compared to 74 percent of men (13). For indigenous women, access to financing mechanisms, including land ownership, is critical as they often live in extremely poor circumstances. Efforts to empower women economically through promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing access to financial services are crucial.

#### 5. Advancing Women's Representation in Politics

Women's representation in politics, including parliaments, cabinets, and international organisations, remains a critical challenge. With only 31 countries having female heads of state or government, and only 26 percent of all parliamentary seats held by women, women's representation is inadequate (14). Since 1945, women have helmed leadership positions in 33 of the world's largest multilateral organisations only 12 percent of the time (15). As such, increasing female representation in political decision-making positions is a crucial transformation for our societies (16).

## 6. Recognising Women as Agents of Change in the Climate Crisis

Women, particularly from marginalised communities, bear the impact of the climate crisis. Despite many successful multilateral environmental agreements, there are critical issues in translating international standards into policy and action. Women often lack access to resources, services, and decision-making spaces, despite their role in agricultural production. Equal access would increase farm yields by 20–30 percent, providing food for 100–150 million people (17). The knowledge and expertise of indigenous women are particularly relevant to build resilience and reduce greenhouse emissions (18). Moreover, women’s representation in parliaments is positively related to climate change policy outcomes (19) and international environmental treaty ratification (20).

### Navigating the Multilateral System

Attaining WLD carries significant political and policy implications, necessitating a cooperative multilateral approach. Multilateral organisations, governments, the private sector, and civil society must together construct frameworks that enhance gender equality and inclusivity. The multilateral system, being a platform for cooperation, standard setting, and policy guidance, should be the primary space to promote women’s rights. Gender-focused conventions, like the Beijing Convention, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions, and the Global Environmental Facility, offer regulatory frameworks supporting public policies and legislation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) epitomise the power of multilateralism, providing a roadmap for human and nature-centred development, including policies for gender-equal societies. However, the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* highlights an urgent need for action on the climate crisis, poverty, and gender inequality, particularly concerning SDG-5 on gender equality. It anticipates 40 more years for equal political representation, and points to ‘code red’ climate change warnings, affecting women and girls most severely (21). The *Gender*

*Snapshot 2022* also states that combatting gender-based violence and protecting women's health and rights are essential to improving gender equality (22).

The G20 economies have two main responsibilities—advancing the SDGs within their territories and offering resources to other countries. Within this, a global plan to finance the SDGs is urgent (23). This entails a substantial overhaul of the international financial architecture, including a revision of the G20 common framework to facilitate greater access for middle-income countries to liquidity and to bolster initiatives such as debt relief, green and inclusive recovery, and the Bridgetown initiative. Investment in women and girls should be prioritised, specifically promoting gender mainstreaming and targeted investment as prerequisites for sustainable development and social cohesion.

### **Key Aspects for Transformational Shifts**

Gender equality and WLD require women to be not only architects of their development but influential agents of societal change. This paves the way for a world where women enjoy equal opportunities to thrive and lead. The following outlines necessary transformational shifts.

First, knowledge development for legal and policy transformation is critical. Gender disaggregated data can pinpoint and address transectional inequalities like education, healthcare access, gender-based violence, and the gendered impact of the climate crisis. This data should inform effective prevention and response measures, resulting in policies and technologies to bridge the gender gap.

Second, we must address the gender digital divide by providing affordable technology and digital resources to women. Investments in digital public infrastructure for inclusive financial service access can drive assertive policy and decision-making. Initiatives should target vulnerable students, recover lost learning due to school closures, and address the gender gap. Promoting women's leadership roles in the educational system and representation in STEM fields is crucial for a more inclusive and connected world.

Third, fostering a safe and supportive environment for women's participation across all sectors is key. Eradicating violence against women and prioritising protective legal frameworks against workplace discrimination and unequal pay conditions for care work can promote equitable working conditions. Such actions will have an impact on raising women's visibility in health sectors.

Fourth, promoting women in leadership positions across public and private sectors is fundamental. Initiatives like 'Ring the Bell for Gender Equality' and the 'FinEmpower Empowering Women towards Economic Security' project are examples of promoting women's economic security. They equip women with resources, skills, and knowledge for full participation across sectors.

Fifth, supporting women entrepreneurs, including financial and non-financial assistance, is key to innovation and economic growth. Environments enabling women entrepreneurs access to financial resources, skill development, and participation in decision-making processes can significantly narrow the gender gap.

Finally, recognising and supporting women, especially indigenous and rural women, in environmental governance is critical. Empowering these women as leading figures in the green revolution, acknowledging their contributions to food production, nature stewardship, low-carbon economies, and encouraging their decision-making participation will foster a sustainable, inclusive future.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, these transformations rely on a robust, inclusive multilateral system prioritising women and girls. Development should be women-led and inclusive, charting a path towards systemic growth. In this progression, women, alongside other marginalised groups, must be the focal point. Institutions and systems must be crafted to accommodate and encourage feminist leadership.

The G20 countries play a crucial role in advancing the SDGs and other international mechanisms, including financial bodies. They should lead policy changes to create sustainable, resilient, peaceful, and equal societies and economies, both within the multilateral system and externally within other countries.

Achieving the SDGs requires the inclusion of women, constituting 50 percent of the global population. Policies that stimulate women's economic, social, and digital empowerment are crucial. Global cooperation and investment in the women's empowerment agenda can improve SDG-5. By working collectively and leaving no one behind, we can sculpt a better world defined by unity and shared futures. The time to start shaping this future is now.

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# **MAKING GENDER EQUALITY PART OF THE DNA OF OUR SOCIETIES**

**VAISHALI NIGAM SINHA**

**T**he quest for equality is ongoing. Over the last few decades, the fight for equality has gained steam and the needle has moved in the right direction, but progress at times has been slow. The gender revolution has been asymmetrical up to this point and needs persistent cultural and institutional changes for acceleration.

To further progress the movement towards justice and fairness, it is important to understand the true meaning and essence of gender equality. This concept has had numerous interpretations over the years. The terms equality and equity have often been used interchangeably. This essay will deep-dive into the concept of gender equality, its meaning, and how the term should be used, and will focus on equality and equity as two distinct concepts while assessing their contribution towards the gender justice movement. It will also talk about how gender equality (goal 5) acts as a facilitator and accelerator for all the other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Participating as Equals with Equal Values**

Gender is a social and cultural construct that includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with a woman, man, girl, boy, and others. Gender is often related to an individual's identity and may differ from their birth-assigned sex. Over the years, this social construct has changed from time to time and from society to society. Historically, men and women have been identified with distinct roles. Men have been perceived as masculine, competitive, and breadwinners for the house, while women have had to take up caregiving roles such as cooking, cleaning, and child and elderly care, all of which are unpaid. These traditional roles have resulted in the hierarchical nature of gender, giving rise to inequalities across the social, cultural, and economic fabric of society. In addition, gender's relationship with power has been viewed as a microcosm of this hierarchical structure.

The concept of gender equality is multifaceted in nature. The most widely accepted definition of gender equality is that of equal rights,

responsibilities, and opportunities for men, women, and others. There are many other definitions. According to UN Women, “Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men” (1). As per the International Labour Organization, “Gender equality is about promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity” (2).

India’s commitment to diversity and equality is enshrined in its constitution—Articles 13, 14, and 15 guarantee women’s equality with men, and nullify existing religious personal laws that conflict with equality provisions (3), while Articles 16, 39(b), 39(c), and 42 are linked to employment opportunities, adequate livelihoods, and secure humane conditions (4). The comprehensive and progressive dedication to gender equality in the Constitution is commendable. With various definitions and laws in place, it is important to understand that equality is really about the equal involvement of men and women in all spheres of life.

Even if the path to gender equality is proving to be challenging, it is useful for us to understand how we have evolved through time. In the 1960s, women had half the legal rights as men and were seldom offered work in industries, the concept of paid maternity leave was unheard of, and there were few legislations addressing domestic violence. Things started to change in the 1970s. The World Bank took cognizance of the issue and established the Women, Business, and the Law Index (WBL Index), which ranks nations based on the laws and policies that impact women’s economic opportunities. In 1970, the global index stood at 46.3 points out of 100; by 2022, it increased to 77.1 (5). In the past decade, 90 million women of working age have achieved legal equality. Despite the dramatic progress, the path remains rocky and full of challenges. Today, approximately 2.4 billion working-age women do not have the same legal protection as men, and the rate of advancement for women’s equality has slowed to its weakest pace in 20 years (6).

While understanding gender equality, it is also important to understand the idea of gender equity. While these terms may often be used

interchangeably, they differ in their meaning and goals. While equality is about equal rights, resources, and opportunities regardless of gender, equity is about fairness and justice. Gender equity refers to the equal distribution of resources and opportunities to reach an equal outcome and recognises that every person has different circumstances. It is gender equity that leads to gender equality, with gender justice being the ideal endpoint.

This journey has been deeply asymmetric. Fourteen economies have achieved legal gender parity (a score of 100 on the WBL Index), and include G20 member countries such as Canada, France, and Germany. However, the progress has been inconsistent in other G20 nations like India, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia, with economies in West Asia, North Africa, and South Asia having the lowest scores in the WBL index (i.e., scores lower than the global average of 77.1).

Despite the squinted progress and day-to-day challenges, we all want to foster meaningful change through continuous efforts and energise the movement for equality by keeping women at the centre of a gender-equal future.

My entrepreneurial journey is very much like others, with a fair number of challenges and success. As a co-founder of a leading renewable energy company in India and now expanding across the globe, my journey from being the only woman employee to now transforming the organisation to have diversity at the core of its growth and development (with 30 percent of women on the board) has been quite fulfilling. Outside ReNew, I have prioritised inclusive engagement where we involve women in rural India through various projects and provide a platform that trains and empowers them to become leaders of tomorrow. In my leadership roles with the UN Global Compact Network India, South Asian Women in Energy (SAWIE), World Economic Forum's Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders, and CII's National Committee on Women in Energy, I am also advancing platforms to involve women in the numerous opportunities emerging in the fast-growing developing world.

I believe we must accelerate our progress, and the only way that can happen faster is by collaborating and building allyship at work and beyond. Moreover, in my opinion, gender equality is not a goal, but a continuous journey.

## **Moving Towards a Gender-Equal Future**

According to estimates, 435 million women globally were living in extreme poverty in 2021; the number of employed women fell by 54 million in 2020; almost one in five young women got married before turning 18 in 2021; female genital mutilation has affected at least 200 million women and girls worldwide; and the COVID-19 outbreak widened existing gender disparities (7). These statistics help us understand the current scenario and depict the downside despite the gains over the last few decades.

The United Nations believes that gender equality is the basis for a peaceful, wealthy, and sustainable world. SDG-5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is a commitment and bold action to advance gender equality. The goal is defined by nine targets and 18 indicators and sub-indicators focusing on ending discrimination, eliminating violence, promoting economic empowerment, and ensuring healthy lives, participation, and leadership (8). These indicators help us measure and monitor progress, taking us a step closer to a gender-equal future, one day at a time.

Even though we have set ambitious targets, the data gap remains a huge challenge, with only 47 percent of data available to track progress on SDG-5. Based on analysis, only 12 percent of the SDG-5 indicators have met their target, 28 percent of the indicators are extremely distant or far from their target, with the rest being at moderate distance and close to the target (9). These percentages clearly show how far we are from women-led development.

Progress on SDG-5 will play a pivotal role in the progress of the other SDGs. To end discrimination against women and girls, we need to ensure they have access to essential health services (SDG-3), access to good

education at an affordable price (SDG-4), access to the labour market (SDG-8), and access to political participation (SDG-10). Furthermore, ending discrimination will help women explore opportunities in the labour market and contribute to economic growth (SDG-8), promote a peaceful and inclusive society (SDG-16), and contribute to a reduction in poverty (SDG-1).

As we understand and uncover the interlinkages between various goals, it is important to recognise the significance of gender-specific indicators for each of the 17 goals. As per our internal research and analysis, there are 10 goals with gender-specific indicators working towards eradicating poverty, achieving zero hunger, good health, gender equality, quality education, and economic growth, among others. The gender-specific SDG indicators along with the supplemental indicators contribute to the progress of these individual goals and take us a step closer to achieving SDG-5. However, we also need to focus on goals that lack indicators related to women's empowerment and gender.

Consider the issues of affordable and clean energy (SDG-7). Globally, 770 million people lack access to power and more than 2.5 billion people lack access to clean cooking, with ~2.5 million premature deaths every year due to household pollution (10). Additionally, women and girls are most severely affected by energy poverty, depriving them from healthcare, education, food security, and access to economic opportunities. Since women continue to face gender disparities in both access and use of energy, we need to solve the issue of energy poverty through a gender lens by building gender-responsive policies at the national and global levels, providing women with equal opportunities in the workforce and supporting women-led business ventures in the energy space.

Another issue to focus on is clean water and sanitation (SDG-6). According to data, 800,000 women die each year from illness linked to a lack of water, basic sanitation, and hygiene (11). Moreover, women and girls globally spend about 200 million hours collecting water every day (12), which increases their risk of facing violence and harassment and results in psychological stress. As women remain underrepresented in water governance, we should work towards recognising them as water



management stakeholders and promoting gender-inclusive water and sanitation initiatives. Apart from these critical issues, we should also focus on increasing women's participation in creative solutions and innovation (contributing to SDG-9), and involve women and their communities in decisions that affect the environment, livelihoods, and the way of life (contributing to SDG-12, SDG-13, SDG-14, and SDG-15).

Over the years, India has secured its women and empowered them through various schemes and policies. Since traditional cooking methods disproportionately affect women, the Indian government launched the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna to replace polluting cooking fuels with LPG for more than eighty million households (13). Through the Jal Jeevan Mission launched in 2019, the government aims to address the issue of water scarcity in rural India by placing women at the centre of water access (14). Moreover, the government has adopted various initiatives to assist women in the energy sector, including the women empowerment scheme, subsidy for female-installed solar home systems, and mainstreaming clean-energy-based solutions in India's rural economy through the Decentralised Renewable Energy (DRE) policy. Through these initiatives, the country is not only enhancing women's empowerment but ensuring health and economic benefits. Finally, to meet the goal of gender equality, more such programmes must be made available along with increased global collaboration and investments (SDG-17).

It is evident that gender equality impacts all 17 SDGs, and we need to do better. To accelerate progress, we must go beyond the current boundaries and introduce gender-specific indicators in all those goals that lack the gender lens. It is important to recognise the strategic reflection of this enhanced relationship. Women and girls must be at the forefront of all elements and areas if we want to move ahead and not fail as a community. Moving forward, progress in SDG-5 will be achieved by increasing social sensitisation, developing advanced legal and policy frameworks, community practices, global cooperation, funding, affirmative action, and shared accountability between men and women.



## The Way Forward

The four A's—action, advocacy, accountability, and allyship—are the key elements of strengthening gender equality. As we recognise the common challenges, gaps, and opportunities in a gender-equal economy, our focus should be on developing and strengthening action and advocacy.

Our model of action should have various dimensions—strengthening data collection (making it accessible and reliable); developing monitoring and evaluation techniques that are gender-sensitive; fighting the structural barriers by introducing policies and frameworks that promote women's development; introducing laws that are both proactive and reactive in nature; enabling environments and social transformation through daily interactions; and increasing investment and financing in gender equality and the related sectors.

The importance of a significant increase in funding to close the gender gap cannot be overstated. As per the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the development assistance committee members committed US\$57.4 billion of their bilaterally allocable official development assistance (ODA) to gender equality in 2020-21, with countries like Canada, Iceland, and Ireland having top ranks when it comes to ODA shares. Moreover, only 4 percent of all bilateral funding went to initiatives whose main goal was gender equality (15). It has also been observed that the amount of financing available for female entrepreneurs is lower in comparison to their male counterparts. Moreover, women encounter greater obstacles and barriers than men. As per the International Finance Corporation (IFC), more than 70 percent of women-owned small and medium enterprises lack access to appropriate or any financial services. Additionally, the percentage of venture capital funding to women-led startups globally has fallen to 2 percent from the 2.3 percent before the pandemic (16). Research shows that women entrepreneurs rely more on self-financing.

With the data available and the current rate of progress, it may take us 286 years to achieve gender equality. While we realise the numerous benefits of investing in gender equality, the funding for SDG-5 is not

on track and continues to fall short. To support the growth of SDG-5, it is important to focus on blended finance, where a diverse set of organisations—government, private, multilateral development banks (MDBs), development finance institutions (DFIs), and philanthropic sectors—can come together and intervene in different roles and responsibilities. In addition, DFIs, MDBs, and foundations possess a higher potential to contribute towards financing dedicated to gender equality. Further, there is a growing need for gender-smart investing to address gender disparities and increase returns. ‘Private Equity and Value Creation: A Fund Manager’s Guide to Gender-Smart Investing’ is one such initiative in the right direction. It was created by British International Investment with the help of the Canadian government and in conjunction with IFC to guide fund managers on improving gender diversity within their own companies and helping integrate a gender focus into investing activities.

Another key element that will play an important role is accountability, which ensures everyone is operating as they should. It promotes and monitors gender balance at all levels (individual, organisational, and country), with impact starting from the individual level. While we live in a society where both women and men are accountable for a gender-equal future, it is also important to focus on the transformational role of men and boys in the lives of women and girls.

Men are often perceived as more privileged, powerful, and masculine. It is time we tear down these existing norms and stereotypes. Advancing gender equality will require roles to be reversed, where men experience holistic parenting and have deeper relationships with dependents, undertake unpaid care and domestic work, and contribute towards activities that uplift and support women around them.

While we engage men in driving the path towards inclusivity, women are accountable and need to ensure the path is productive, respectful, and focused on women’s and girls’ rights. Lastly, allyship is the key to gender balance. It is time for men to be seen as and to become advocates for gender equality at home and work. The data shows that 96 percent of organisations experience success when men are deliberately involved

in gender inclusion programmes, compared to 30 percent of organisations where men are not involved (17). Men are seen as significant players who may share responsibilities and actively engage in supportive partnerships with women. Therefore, advancing male allies is a powerful strategy to address gender inequity and accelerate mutual growth.

For meaningful change, interventions must be achieved at the micro and macro levels, starting from the roots. It is the four A's that will take us a step closer to both equity and equality.

## Conclusion

As men and women together prepare for the change and break the existing system, there are four pillars on the path to equality.

- **Increased investment and financing** through national funding along with blended finance for gender equality
- **Enhanced policy roadmap** for SDG-5 with measurable and time-bound objectives to meet long-term and short-term goals
- **Strengthening partnerships** through a multilateral and multi-stakeholder platform
- **Closing data gaps** by strengthening the monitoring and evaluation techniques, starting at the root level

These four pillars will chart our path towards equality, making a woman's current 'multiple-hurdle marathon' a 100-metre sprint. The time has come to accelerate the progress in the critical area of women's empowerment and gender equality, as it will also accelerate our effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

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# **WOMEN AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE TO ENSURE PEACE AND SECURITY**

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**I**t has been over two decades since Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was adopted by the United Nations Security Council. The resolution called for parties to increase the involvement of women and integrate gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts, as well as to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, especially in times of conflict. The G20, with its considerable economic and political influence, presents a unique opportunity to drive meaningful change and set an example for the rest of the world when it comes to promoting gender equality in peace and security efforts.

In examining the status of women's involvement in peace negotiations in the G20 countries, it is evident that some member states have made significant strides in promoting gender inclusivity, while others continue to face challenges in this regard.

Countries like Canada and Germany have been at the forefront of championing women's participation in peace processes and have taken concrete steps to ensure gender representation at various stages of negotiations (1). They have recognised that women's unique perspectives and experiences can contribute significantly to creating more sustainable and inclusive discourse.

However, in certain G20 countries, women's participation in peace negotiations remains limited, and their voices are often underrepresented or excluded entirely. This lack of inclusivity not only hampers the potential for durable peace but also perpetuates the marginalisation of women in decision-making processes.

In many ways, we are now at a watershed moment for the role of women in global peace and security. Conflict and violence are rising, and violent extremism and climate change threaten our societies. It is a well-known fact that in every conflict and crisis, women carry a disproportionate burden (2). In conflicts from Ukraine to Sudan, sexual violence against women is used as a weapon of war, and in Iran, the call for a woman's right to freedom of expression and education is being met with the death



sentence. Women leaders forced to flee Afghanistan as the Taliban took hold in August 2021 continue their advocacy for women and girls. They are answering the call to lead in times of uncertainty, building networks for change-making and using their voices to inspire others to act (3). The Afghan women working with Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security are one example of women worldwide fighting for their right to equal recognition within the peace and security processes. This gives us hope because we know that when women are at the peace table, sustainable and lasting peace is more likely to be achieved (4). As Hillary Clinton so famously said, women's rights are human rights. The fundamental human right for women to be at the negotiation table leads to stronger economies, better health and education systems, robust democracies, and, most importantly, peace.

### **Women at the Peace Table**

When Georgetown Institute launched the Women, Peace and Security Index, we did so knowing that women are the key to peace. The Index ranks 170 countries on WPS; nations that rank higher are more peaceful and prosperous, and those at the bottom are unstable and more likely to be conflict-affected. There is a direct correlation between gender inequality and conflict, just as there is a direct correlation between women's and the nation's well-being. Promoting gender equality and increasing women's inclusion in justice and security negotiations are central to women's well-being and their country's—and the world's—prospects for peace.

Today, women are still largely shut out of the negotiation room and given little space to speak on how post-conflict societies are structured. Women comprise only 6 percent of mediators, 6 percent of signatories and witnesses, and 14 percent of negotiators (5). This is problematic, not only for the women who deserve to have a say in the governance systems they live within but also for the society at large that wishes for stable and lasting peace.

Peace agreements often fall apart; over 50 percent fail within the first five years. Studies have shown that peace is 35 percent more likely to last more than 15 years when women and civil society groups engage in peace negotiation (6). This is a huge difference. A strong correlation exists between a peace agreement signed by a woman delegate and peace sustaining over the long term (7). This is because when women are at the table, they are more likely to argue for provisions that work for the whole of society—men and women alike. The presence of women also gives the negotiations legitimacy in the eyes of the public (half of whom, of course, are women). It increases the chance that problematic social norms and power imbalances, which may often be the root causes of conflict in the first place, are rectified within the transition period (8).

These are not just bold statements grounded in academic research; the social proof is evident.

In Northern Ireland, women mobilised based on their shared experiences, and leveraged their resources to gain access to the peace process. The Northern Ireland Woman's Coalition party acted as an "honest broker" between the two opposing sides, and their participation was critical to integrating issues into the Good Friday Agreement (9).

In the Philippines, the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement that ended a 50-year conflict significantly included robust and extensive gender responsiveness and inclusivity measures. The principal drafters of the agreement on both sides were women, and external women's networks also influenced the settlement's language, format, and agenda. It was the women's "meticulousness" over language that removed any space for ambiguity that could be problematic in the future, resulting in lasting, stable peace.

Even in countries where women have been excluded from the formal negotiation table, women in civil society have still made waves in the peace process through activism. In Colombia, mediators frequently met with women activist groups, who successfully lobbied for reparations for human rights violations and provisions to address gender inequality. In Kenya, civil society coalitions of women were vital to allying the various

factions and aligning their messaging. In Guatemala, the women's sector prioritised issues on which everyone could agree by consensus and inserted caveats on development, ending discrimination against indigenous women, women's rights and equality in the home, access to education, and increased opportunities for women (10).

With war raging in Ukraine, the question of how to rebuild a country while it is still at war is being discussed by governments and multilateral banks alike (11). While this is a complex, expensive, and tense topic, a proven way to ensure that the route taken benefits all of Ukrainian society is to involve women in the redevelopment process.

Ultimately, including women in peace negotiations concerns political will, leadership, and power, but women's inclusion spans beyond the peace table. Women's involvement in the economy, education, healthcare, and every area of civil society is critical for creating and maintaining stable and just communities.

## **Women's Economic Rights and Conflict**

Countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women can exercise full and equal rights and opportunities (12). Regions with higher gender gaps in education, employment, financial inclusion, and political participation rates are all associated with higher levels of violence, and the relationship between gender inequality and conflict and fragility is deeply enmeshed. In a similar vein, economic performance and peace are mutually reinforcing. More robust financial performance allows for peacebuilding, leading to stronger economic performance. However, the opposite is also true—a weakening economy hinders peace and perpetuates cycles of conflict.

The nature of warfare has seen a shift in the twenty-first century. Intra-state conflicts are no longer the norm, and civil wars are more likely to occur. Civilians are increasingly harmed, with women experiencing conflict differently from men. Women are more likely to be injured or killed by the indirect effects of conflict and its long-term consequences:

the collapse of social order, human rights abuses, sexual violence, sickness and health deterioration, and economic deprivation (13).

Economic deprivation seriously affects the livelihoods of women and their wider societies. Conflict and fragility disproportionately impact women and girls, especially regarding economic opportunity. Globally, women are less likely to have a bank account, less likely to participate in the labour market, less likely to have access to social security, less likely to be entrepreneurs, and are paid less than men. However, they are more likely to work in informal and vulnerable labour markets and more likely to undertake unpaid work that is vital for a working economy. In post-conflict societies, four in five women were involved in paid employment work within the agricultural sector, with low wages and nearly non-existent legal protections (14). By severely limiting women's access to the labour markets, economies are being stifled, leading to conditions in which conflict and violence can reign unchecked. This further threatens women's livelihoods as conflict exacerbates societal inequalities and breaks down social networks, making women more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation.

Growing economies in post-conflict societies and fragile states can be challenging. But providing women with economic opportunities yields significant human development gains. When women earn, they spend their money in patterns that positively affect the whole community. They invest in their families, education, healthcare, and nutrition, and seek to raise the standard of living for themselves and those around them. Investments in female entrepreneurship are essential to building sustainable communities, and women's economic equality is central to realising and protecting women's rights. When women work, economies grow. Stable economies are paramount to the transition a country makes from war to peace, and can help to prevent conflict from breaking out in the first place. By advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls, we can improve their human rights and those of the global community by building a foundation for sustainable peace.

## Women and Democracy

The rights of women and a country's democratic status are inextricably linked. Countries that score highly on the WPS Index also have higher performance on all three democratic indices—the availability of contestation within a political system, freedom of association and assembly, and checks and balances on the governing body (15). However, over the past two decades, democracy has been receding globally (16). This same anti-democratic turn has seen actors curtail women's rights, from the near-total ban on abortion enacted in Poland in 2020 to Türkiye removing itself from the Istanbul Convention, the legal framework that promotes women's rights and protects them from threats and acts of violence.

There is a strong correlation between anti-democratic political ideologies and the likelihood of their controlling actors curtailing women's rights. The rise of populism we see worldwide is threatening democracy and turning nations inward, which presents a real and substantial threat to the WPS mission. When considering the path we see the world to be on, it is essential now more than ever to show the difference that women's participation and leadership make for peace and stability on a global scale, as well as make clear the risks and losses that are suffered by all of society when they are absent from the table.

## Recommendations to the G20

This year is a moment to take stock of how far we have come and how much work we have left. A recent World Bank report shows that women only have full rights in 14 countries worldwide (17). This is an issue starkly present within the G20 countries. Maternal mortality rates are on the rise—increasing across Europe and the Americas, with as much as a 40 percent increase in the US (18). In the UK, the number of people afraid of advocating for women's rights doubled between 2017 and 2023, and an Ipsos survey of 32 countries revealed that 55 percent of men and 41 percent of women believe that the fight for gender equality has gone so far that men are now being discriminated against (19).

So, what must the G20 governments do to advance gender equality?

1. Do not deprioritise the fight for women's rights. While other global issues may dominate the news, we know these issues are unlikely to be solved without including gendered perspectives. Women must be present at all levels of negotiation.
2. Engage with the concept of a feminist foreign policy. Individual human security must be better protected within national legislation focusing on dismantling global political and economic power structures that reinforce and recreate gender and power imbalances and other kinds of discrimination and injustices.
3. Invest in female health, education, and infrastructure, and see these investments as the foundations for a just and equitable society.
4. And finally—as the slogan so famously invoked in the 1990s by the South African disability movement—nothing about us, without us. Include women in all decision-making processes that affect their rights.

Men and women must work together. No negotiations should occur without the meaningful inclusion of women and, most importantly, *local* women. By including women in the mechanisms of the state, we can guarantee that these services will serve the people they are designed for. This will be hard, patient work, but if we only see women as victims, this prevents us from seeing them as solutions.

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**A VITAL LINK:  
CONNECTING THE  
DOTS ON GENDER AND  
CLIMATE CHANGE**

JUSTIN WORLAND

Charlotte Magayi's journey from the slums of Nairobi to the world stage as a successful entrepreneur began with a tragic, if mundane, incident: her daughter suffered a burn injury from a cookstove. Handling these dangerous stoves presents a challenge to women not just in Sub-Saharan Africa but around the world, including in G20 countries like Brazil and India.

Thinking of the women and children in her local community first, Magayi set out to fix the problem, developing a safer cookstove that also cut down on indoor air pollution. In the process, she built a powerful engine for women's empowerment. Her product protects the health and well-being of the women who use it, and her company, Mukuru Clean Stoves, has helped hundreds of women enter the workforce, employing them as distribution agents. "We partner with the people who are most impacted to distribute the solution to as many people as possible," Magayi told me earlier this year.

What strikes me most about Magayi's work is how it tackles multiple problems at once. It reduces indoor air pollution, a major health strain. It cuts the greenhouse gas emissions produced by cookstoves typically running on high-emitting energy sources like charcoal. And the company provides employment to nearly 500 local women while empowering women at home to protect their loved ones. It is an almost perfect example of the ways in which climate and gender intersect.

In my writing and reporting about climate change over the last decade, I have adopted a mantra that "climate is everything" as shorthand to express the many intersections between climate and other issues. As a corollary to that formulation is the reality that, within climate, issues of gender equity are everywhere. Women are more vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change, and are consistently hit disproportionately by climate extremes. And, at the same time, they are often the strongest advocates of climate solutions.

Over the years, I have seen firsthand the disparate impact that climate change has on women as well as the unique ways women can lead the

fight against climate change. Yet, at times, I have steered clear of the issue out of concern that I might occupy too much space when women's voices should be heard. At times, stepping aside can be the right approach, but it should not be the only one. Truly tackling the issues at the intersection of climate and gender will require a cultural shift, and men need to participate to help deliver it.

## A Global Challenge

It is important to ground any gender and climate discussion in the dizzying array of research that shows both the challenge that climate change poses to women's empowerment and the opportunity that women's empowerment presents for climate action.

At the heart of the challenge is the vulnerable position women are placed in across the globe as a result of social and economic injustice. Higher rates of poverty among women than in the general population, lower levels of educational attainment, and a lack of institutional power all make women, on average, more vulnerable to climate-linked disasters (1).

Those problems are often insidious—invisible to outsiders but still both destructive and pervasive. Take the well-documented link between climate change and domestic and sexual violence against women. The government of Canada's British Columbia, for example, found that domestic violence reports increase following wildfires and the social stress they create (2). Researchers have found similar trends across the globe. Two tropical storms drove a 300 percent increase in domestic violence in Vanuatu, for example (3). And, in many places, disasters can lead to increased instances of child marriage as families sell off daughters to make ends meet (4).

Of course, every woman's experience is different, and some are more or less vulnerable depending on their socioeconomic status, geography, and sexual orientation, among a wide range of factors. Moreover, it is important not to think of women just as victims. Women are leading in the climate fight from a range of positions and vantage points (5),

and research consistently shows that increasing the share of women in leadership positions correlates with more climate action (6). That applies to everything from parliamentarians enacting climate legislation to the women working as distribution agents for Mukuru Clean Stoves.

## Recommended Policy Solution

Addressing the intersection of gender and climate will require a coalition that extends beyond women working with a common purpose. A comprehensive list of policy solutions is beyond the scope of this essay. Still, a few solutions categories stand out from my time reporting in the field and conversations with policymakers around the globe.

**Grow representation:** Despite years of commitments to gender equality from governments and companies, women still make up a fraction of leadership voices in the climate and energy space. At COP26, women made up only 37 percent of the delegates from national delegations (7). In the energy sector, women make up only 16 percent of the workforce and represent an even smaller share of upper management (8).

With concerted effort, leaders can begin to address this disparity. Most obviously, leaders can ensure that women are also appointed to senior positions. Ensuring a robust talent pipeline also helps address the divide—and can do so relatively quickly. Mexico, for example, launched a Youth Ambassadors for Climate programme to actively seek out women and other underrepresented groups and bring them into the country's COP delegation. In 2021, 72 percent of delegation members were women, a dramatic increase from a high of 44 percent in the years between 2013 and 2017 (9).

**Advance education:** Around the world, women still face significant barriers to education, particularly in low-income countries where women are much less likely than their male counterparts to receive primary and secondary education. Those gaps are generally smaller in G20 countries, but nonetheless a significant gap remains when it comes to education in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) (10).

Across the G20, countries are using technical vocational educational training, a programme that equips participants to enter new fields like clean energy, to try to reduce the divide. Strategies to encourage women to participate vary from providing childcare in Türkiye to ensuring that girls are exposed to STEM topics at a young age, as in Australia, the European Union, and elsewhere (11).

Education helps even for women who are not able to join professional ranks. Women farmers in much of the developing world, for example, benefit from programmes that help them produce resilient crops. Magayi, of Mukuru Clean Stoves, explained that the women she employs are best able to educate other women about the health and safety risks of their cookstoves.

**Funding and finance:** Programmes to address the education and representation issues may work great on paper, but they will accomplish little without proper funding. Indeed, many of the existing programmes focused on these issues are not fully funded. More than half of national biodiversity strategies reference women and gender concerns in the context of conservation, according to a Convention on Biodiversity Survey, but only 9 percent of those plans have any budget dedicated to addressing the issue (12).

At a more macro level, countries have made commitments to so-called gender responsive finance, which uses a gender lens to evaluate lending, with US\$7 billion committed between 2018 and 2020 by the development finance organisations of the G7 countries (13). An ongoing push seeks to ensure that gender and climate are linked to make gender-responsive lending climate responsive.

## Allyship and Beyond

This list of policy solutions is not comprehensive and is intended only to give a flavour of the various policy solutions that could make concrete progress on the challenges at the intersection of gender and climate. Nonetheless, it is clear that we have solutions; we just need to choose to use them.

Making that choice as a society is easier said than done. There are, of course, many barriers, including entrenched misogyny, that cannot be overcome in a matter of days, months, or even years. But there is an opportunity to spark a cultural shift that can move the ball forward.

Despite the vast literature that exists already, people in positions of influence—including and especially men—can continue to lay the groundwork for these conversations by highlighting the ways in which climate and gender intersect. This can be accomplished in part through the efforts of dedicated allies, but policies can help, too. In Canada, for example, policymakers apply a method known as Gender-based Analysis Plus to evaluate the link between gender and various policies, including climate policies. The tool helps illuminate the surreptitious dynamics at play, from the way in which climate-linked disasters pull women out of the workforce to care for their children to the effects of extreme heat on pregnant women (14).

Paying attention to often invisibilised ways that climate change and gender intersect will help move gender from a siloed issue to one that is ‘mainstreamed’ and considered alongside other critical climate policy issues. This is, in a way, simply a matter of efficiency. Women are especially vulnerable to climate change, so incorporating gender concerns into policymaking ensures that the policies are well-designed (15). Yet, truly mainstreaming gender into climate policy will require a significant shift.

Men, in particular, could help spark this change. A slew of research has shown the positive effects male allyship has on workplaces, communities, and society at large. “When men and boys recognize and acknowledge their privileges as males, it is a step towards acknowledging that women and girls face discrimination throughout their lifecycle,” said UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous in a speech in 2022 (16).

Allyship begins with a recognition of the link between gender and climate, but that is just a first step. Advancing gender-inclusive policies requires a willingness to engage in these discussions and to help elevate them. Importantly, it requires public officials, private sector executives, and NGO



leaders to find the role gender plays in their existing climate work—and to act on it.

There is a final role for men to play as allies: knowing when to stop talking. And, with that, I pass the mic.

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# WOMEN IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

KIRAN MAZUMDAR-SHAW

*“It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.”*

- **Article 51A(h), Constitution of India**

**S**cience and technology have played a truly transformative role in India’s development by enabling economic growth, wealth creation, societal transformation, and a better quality of life for all its citizens.

In the decades after Independence, India invested significantly in establishing academic institutions, laboratories, and research centres across the country. To further scientific research, India established various government organisations, including the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in 1942, the Department of Atomic Energy in 1954, the Defence Research and Development Organisation in 1958, the departments of Electronics and Science and Technology in 1971, the Department of Space in 1972, and the Department of Environment in 1980.

In 1976, India became one of the few countries in the world to enshrine the “spirit of inquiry and scientific temper” in its Constitution, mandating the development of a scientific outlook, humanism, and a spirit of inquiry as the responsibility of every Indian citizen.

In time, this spirit of inquiry has led to the setting up of over 1,100 universities, 43,000 colleges, and over 11,000 standalone institutions across the country, which currently enrol over 41 million students (1). In the top institutions, science students are doing world-class research, publishing in leading journals, and boosting the country’s global reputation. National scientific research institutes and leading universities have all contributed to India’s growing strengths in research. With 1.3 million academic papers published between 2017 and 2022, India recorded the fourth-highest research output worldwide (2).

India today stands among the leading nations when it comes to renewable energy installations, and possesses the world’s third-largest start-up ecosystem with over 84,000 recognised start-ups in 2022 (3).

The country has gained international recognition for its active participation in significant scientific endeavors, including the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, and the Square Kilometre Array.

In fact, science and technology have played a key role in the significant progress India has made on the Global Innovation Index (GII), a leading benchmark for measuring a country's innovation capabilities, over the past few years. India ranked 40th on the 132-nation GII in 2022, a leap of 41 places in seven years (4).

Indian women scientists have been the force and spirit behind the country's emergence into a progressive and scientific innovation-led nation. India's experience in promoting women's empowerment through increased female participation in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) could serve as a template for other G20 member countries to develop evidence-based programmes and policies to accelerate women-led development.

## **The Science-Led Journey to a Prosperous Future**

With India aiming to create at least 90 million new non-farm jobs by 2030, it is amply clear that the country will need to invest in breakthrough ideas and embrace entrepreneurship as an economic model of growth.

Despite relatively low funding support, India's knowledge-led industries such as biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and information technology have contributed significantly to economic growth and job creation in the country.

I set up Biocon as India's first biotech start-up with a seed capital of just INR 10,000 and three employees, including myself, in a garage in Bengaluru in 1978. Today, Biocon is a leading global biopharmaceuticals enterprise catering to the relatively unmet need of patients for affordable

lifesaving medicines in over 100 countries. Besides making a huge impact on global healthcare, Biocon generates annual revenues of ~US\$1.4 billion and employs over 16,500 people directly, and has a multiplier effect on employment through the several ancillary businesses it relies on or supports.

India's 'bioeconomy' was worth over US\$80 billion in 2021, with over 5,300 biotech start-ups across the country—a figure that is expected to nearly double by 2025 (5). It is the capacity for innovation and value creation that has catapulted India to become the twelfth most attractive biotechnology destination globally and third in the Asia-Pacific region (6).

Just as Biocon pioneered biotechnology in India, Infosys sowed the seeds of India's US\$240-billion information technology industry that now employs over ~5.4 million people (7).

Companies like Biocon and Infosys have demonstrated how business and science can come together to bring multiple benefits to the country and usher in a better life for millions of Indians.

Premier scientific institutions are also playing an important role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in India. Take, for example, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru. IISc's Foundation for Science Innovation and Development has incubated about 80 deep science start-ups in the last 10 years and 30 more are currently at the incubation stage (8).

## **Role of Women in Science, Technology, and Innovation**

Diversity is crucial for science because it adds dimension and perspective, which fosters creative thinking to solve some of the most complex problems through increased critical thinking, creativity, and innovation.

Women can approach and interact with problems differently than men, leading to new ways of thinking.

Several women in India have achieved tremendous success in various fields of science. Soumya Swaminthan, chief scientist of the World Health Organization, played a key role in translating evidence into health policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Priya Abraham made a significant medical breakthrough by isolating the deadly coronavirus in India while serving as director of the National Institute of Virology, Pune. Tessy Thomas helped develop some of the most advanced missiles in the world with home-grown technologies, earning the moniker of 'Missile Woman of India'. Ritu Karidhal was dubbed the 'Rocket Woman of India' for her role in helming one of the country's most ambitious lunar projects as mission director of the Chandrayaan-2 mission. Gagandeep Kang became the first woman from India to be elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society. Renowned biologist Chandrima Saha broke the glass ceiling when, in 2020, she became the first-ever woman president of the Indian National Science Academy in its 85-year history.

Women entrepreneurs like MapMyGenome founder Anu Acharya and Onco-Stem Diagnostics founder Manjiri Bakre have made a significant impact in biotechnology in India. OncoStem delivers innovative, cost-effective, and reliable tests for personalised cancer treatment, while MapMyGenome offers personalised health solutions based on genetic tests that help people understand their genetic makeup. Both Acharya and Bakre have STEM backgrounds. Bakre worked in academia at Mt Sinai School of Medicine and Moores Cancer Center in the US, while Acharya holds a graduate degree from IIT-Kharagpur, and postgraduate degrees in physics and management information systems from the University of Illinois.

My own successful entrepreneurial journey in the life sciences industry is deeply rooted in STEM education. I was 25 when I embarked on my entrepreneurial journey. Without any business education or financial backing, I was in uncharted territory. It was my STEM education that gave me the confidence to build a biotech company from scratch. Through my graduate and postgraduate years, I imbibed the qualities of curiosity, creativity, and innovative thinking. STEM education helped me develop traits like critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving, risk-taking, and leadership.

## Why Diversity Matters and How to Enable It

The STEM industries are at the heart of innovation and technological advancement. Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and data analytics are going to be the top emerging jobs of the future.

As India transforms digitally at a rapid pace, the demand for a technologically competent employee base will also grow exponentially. The good news is that India produces the largest STEM workforce in the world. In 2021, 34 percent of Indian graduates were in STEM, and the country is adding an estimated 2.14 million graduates annually to the STEM pool every year (9).

What is heartening is the fact that India also leads in the percentage of women STEM graduates. Over 40 percent of Indians who graduate in STEM disciplines are women. Paradoxically, however, women are underrepresented in India's STEM workforce, accounting for a mere 28 percent (10).

In this, India reflects a familiar global pattern. A large gender gap persists at all levels in the STEM fields despite the great strides in women's participation in higher education worldwide. Globally, women account for just 31 percent of research and development positions in science (11). Women remain a minority in digital information technology, computing, physics, mathematics, and engineering. These are the fields that are driving the digital revolution and so, many of the jobs of tomorrow.

This gender gap in the STEM workforce means that women are not making most of the job opportunities available to highly educated and skilled professionals in cutting-edge fields such as AI, where only one in five professionals were female (12). This is a matter of concern as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is not only vital for global economic development but also necessary for advancing towards all targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Women's exclusion from the digital world has shaved US\$1 trillion from the GDP of low and middle-income countries in the last decade, and



this loss is estimated to grow to US\$1.5 trillion by 2025 without any affirmative action (13).

We need to increase women's participation and leadership in digital information technology, because the science and technology being applied for developing the cutting-edge products of tomorrow need to be objective and bias-free. Imperfect data and poorly designed algorithms can exacerbate bias. We need to ensure broad gender participation in shaping technology, with human rights at its core.

A gender-inclusive approach to innovation, technology, and digital education can also make women and girls more aware of their rights and encourage civic engagement. This, in turn, will offer immense opportunities to address development and humanitarian challenges.

### CASE STUDY: How India is Trying to Enable Women in STEM Achieve their Full Potential

At 47 percent, India has more women graduating in STEM subjects than some developed countries such as the US (34 percent), the UK (38 percent), and even Germany (27 percent) (14). Compared to their global counterparts, Indian women scientists are also more prolific in terms of scientific publications.

The significant number of women engineers and bio-scientists graduating every year in India does not, however, translate into employability and leadership in the STEM workforce. Data from the National Science Foundation showed that while 52 percent of women enrolled in STEM courses for graduation, only 29 percent joined the STEM workforce (15). The latest data also showed that just 3 percent of women enroll in PhDs in sciences and only 6 opt for a PhD in engineering and technology (16).

A career in the sciences starts right after completing a PhD, but for most Indian women, it coincides with marriage and family commitments. When a woman takes a leave of absence or temporary research position

to balance her dual duties, it is often disadvantageous later in her career. As a woman employer, I have lost many senior female managers to marriage or to a spouse being transferred either overseas or to another location in the country. Women also tend to give up senior management responsibilities after childbirth or when they have to take on the responsibility of caring for aging parents. What we see is that during her mid-career phase, a woman often ends her professional career. Even those women professionals who return end up quitting soon after. Thus, a minuscule 3 percent of women hold CEO posts in India's STEM industry (17).

If we want women to progress and become more significant in leadership positions, we need to make all-round efforts to improve the gender ratio and increase the participation of women in the STEM workforce. The New Education Policy 2020 in India has come up with several proposals to increase women's participation in STEM, including multidisciplinary learning through the integration of the humanities and arts with STEM.

The Department of Science & Technology (DST) has launched the Vigyan Jyoti scheme for meritorious girl students in high school to pursue STEM subjects. DST's Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE) scheme is aimed at getting more talented young women to undertake higher education in science-intensive programmes. The department has also restructured all its women-specific programmes under one umbrella, Women in Science and Engineering - Knowledge Involvement Research Advancement through Nurturing (WISE-KIRAN), which aims to address issues related to women scientists (such as unemployment, career breaks, and relocation) through its various initiatives. Under this, in June 2023, the department launched a programme, WIDUSHI (Women's Instinct for Developing and Ushering in Scientific Heights and Innovation), for retiring or retired women scientists (aged between 57 and 62 years) and senior women scientists who are not in regular employment (aged between 45 and 62 years).

At the same time, Indian IT companies are providing equal opportunities for work and are striving to create a bias-free environment for both men and women.

The silver lining is that we now have more women opting for engineering as a career. In 1970-71, there were about two women to 100 men in engineering (or about 2 percent) (18). Indian women engineers have come a long way since then. In 2022, the number of women taking admissions in B. Tech. courses across various Indian Institutes of Technology had gone up to 20 percent (19).

Today, companies such as Infosys, Wipro, Mindtree, SAP, Accenture, and Capgemini report that about half their entry-level recruits are women. This is up from less than 20 percent of the workforce being women around 2008 (20). These IT companies are recognising the diversity of thought, creativity, and innovation that women bring to the table, and this is opening up more opportunities for women engineers. Indeed, studies have shown that women programmers tend to be very calculative and methodical in nature, and are good at analysing and breaking down a large problem into small parts (21).

## Conclusion

If India wishes to increase the number of women in STEM, it will have to improve educational opportunities and combat the prevalent perceptions about gender roles. Gender barriers start operating from birth, and archaic societal perceptions often shape women's opinions of themselves and society's expectations of their roles. Across all strata of Indian society, people still believe that women can perform only certain types of jobs and that marriage must take precedence over a career. This mindset, among both men and women, needs to change if any progress is to be made.

The government needs to strengthen programmes that can increase women's participation in STEM subjects, including measures that encourage the development of scientific skills and motivate girls to enrol in STEM subjects in higher education. There is also an urgent need to improve access to information for young women interested in the sciences, as such information is often unavailable in universities and schools in semi-urban areas despite many government programmes. It also needs to increase the number of women scientists and technologists in key decision-making positions and increase women's participation in academies, other government, and research organisations. The government will need to further strengthen the research and development infrastructure in women-only universities.

The corporate sector should earmark funds, more scholarships, and programmes for women as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives. Opportunities need to be provided to Indian women scientists, engineers, and technologists to undertake international collaborative research in premier institutions abroad for a short duration to enhance their research capabilities.

Transforming institutions with a more gender-sensitive approach and greater inclusiveness in institutional systems and processes will also go a long way in achieving the ultimate goal of improving gender equity.

India will benefit the most in terms of faster economic growth with greater women's participation in the economy. As more women take on leadership roles, it will potentially unleash transformational societal change that leads to sustainable economic development, thus ensuring that the fruits of economic development are enjoyed by all.

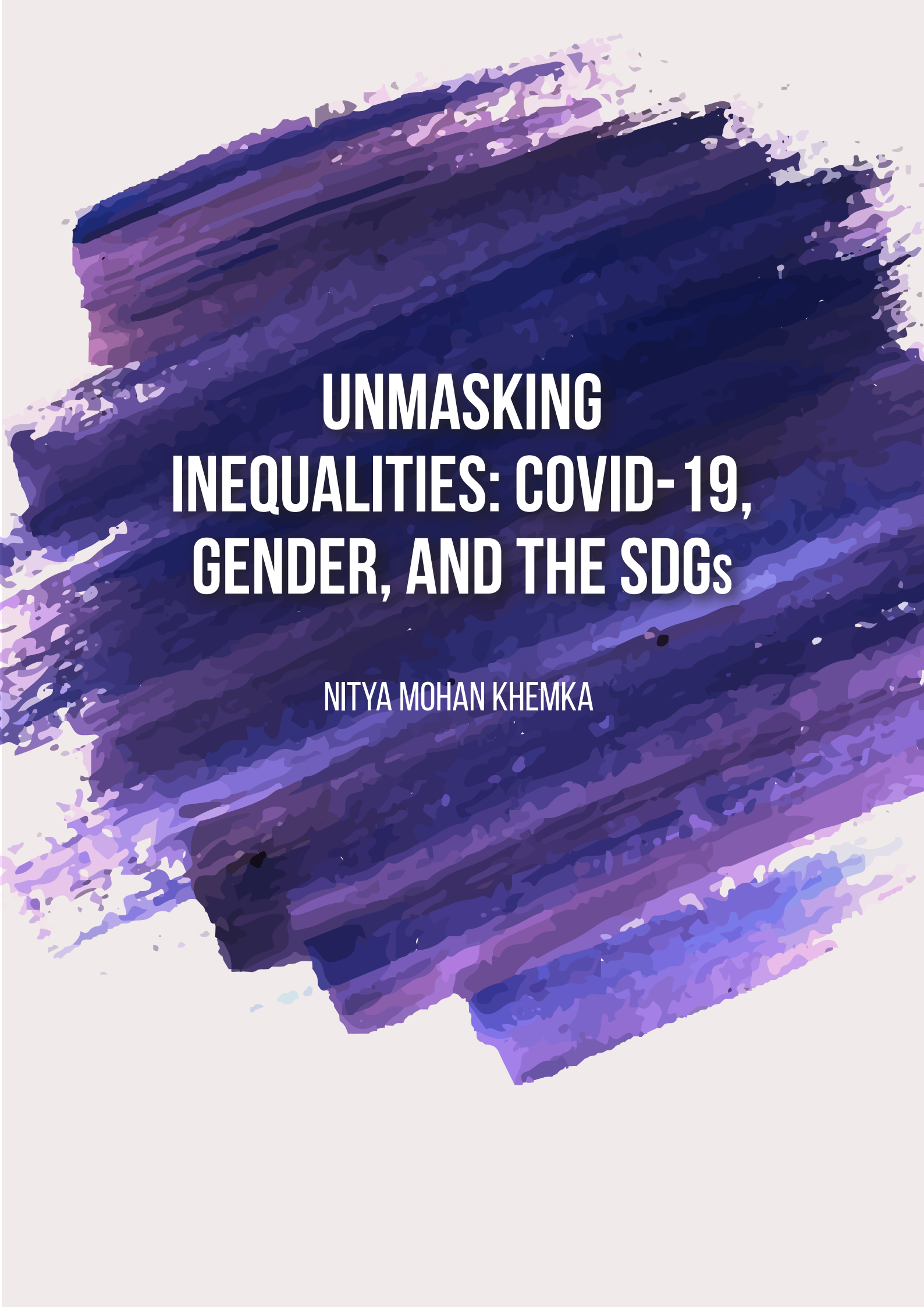
India's G20 presidency thus provides a great opportunity for a transformational shift towards a world where there is equal participation and leadership of women and girls in STEM disciplines, which will lead to achieving the ultimate goal of ensuring gender equity.

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# UNMASKING INEQUALITIES: COVID-19, GENDER, AND THE SDGs

NITYA MOHAN KHEMKA



**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has deepened intersecting vulnerabilities for millions of women and girls, simply because of their sex. The UN Secretary-General highlighted COVID-19 as a crisis with a woman's face (1). Even before the pandemic, women earned less, saved less, held less secure jobs, and were more likely to be employed in the informal sector globally. They had less access to social protection and were the majority of single-parent households. Unsurprisingly, their capacity to absorb economic shocks is less than that of men (2). The pandemic sharply amplified these gendered vulnerabilities.

The pandemic serves as a stark reminder of the severe gender implications of exogenous shocks on women's health and livelihoods. The example of COVID-19 has also shown that while the economic and health impacts of such shocks are immediately visible, the gendered nature of the severe social costs—including impacts on education, unpaid care work, gender-based violence and mental health—have received less attention in public discourse, even though the “adverse impacts were particularly skewed towards women, in terms of the increased burden of unpaid care work; higher exposure risks due to the overrepresentation of women in healthcare; job losses in the informal sector; and elevated levels of gender-based violence” (3). The cross-cutting nature of gender-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) means that a setback on one will have repercussions on other interlinked SDGs, and improvements in one target can have a positive impact on interlinked SDGs.

Accounting for 85 percent of the global economy, 80 percent of world trade, and two-thirds of the global population, the G20 economies are a potential platform for enabling sustainable policies to ensure equal futures for men and women. However, a large share of G20 policies tend to be gender-neutral, leading to gender-unequal outcomes (4). The G20 offers an important entry-point for conversations on investment in social development that tackles the multidimensional nature of gender inequality, including required efficiency and equity measures that are key to accelerating progress towards achieving all the SDGs.

## Locating the Gendered Approach in the G20

In the post-pandemic era, two successive G20 leaders' declarations—the 2021 Rome Declaration and the 2022 Bali Declaration—have acknowledged that women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by the cascading effects of the pandemic, and have committed to placing gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG-5) at the core of the G20's efforts for inclusive recovery and sustainable development (5,6).

The Rome Declaration commits to providing equal access to education and opportunities, eliminating gender-based violence, enhancing social, health, care, and educational services, overcoming gender stereotypes, and addressing the uneven distribution of unpaid care and domestic work (7). The Bali Declaration focuses on how paid and unpaid care has affected the economic position of women, particularly post-COVID-19 (8), and states that care is a shared responsibility between genders, as well as the responsibility of countries and societies. Against this backdrop of commitments to work towards 'caring economies' and 'caring societies', the G20 leadership can steer the world towards women-led development rather than development for women. It is truly creditable that women-led development has been the guiding light of India's G20 presidency and has enabled a shift in the narrative, placing women's agency at the centre of the development discourse across education, entrepreneurship, finance, and beyond.

## Challenges to Achieving the SDGs

**Economic disruptions:** The pandemic led to widespread job losses, and women were disproportionately affected. Women are more likely to work in industries that have been severely impacted, such as hospitality, retail, and the informal sector. These job losses have had both immediate and long-term effects on women's financial security and overall well-being. Of over 1,700 COVID-19 response policy measures on social protections, only 23 percent targeted women's economic security or provided support for unpaid care (9). The pandemic-induced poverty surge has increased the gender poverty gap, as households deprived of income and on the

brink of poverty reallocate their resources and priorities, often to the detriment of women and young girls.

**Disruptions to education:** The closure of schools in low-income settings where the literacy levels are already low and where girl children are often the first generation in the household to go to school, has led to severe social stress. According to UNESCO, 1.52 billion students (87 percent) and over 60 million teachers were confined to their homes as schools were shuttered due to the pandemic (10). Evidence from previous pandemics shows that adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to dropping out of formal education and not returning to school even after the health crisis abates (11). Estimates projected that after the COVID-19 pandemic, between 11 million and 20 million girls would not return to school once they reopened, and this is clear in countries such as Uganda, where 18 percent of grade 12 girls have not returned, compared to 2 percent of boys (12).

**Increased caregiving responsibilities:** With school closures and the shift to remote learning, women often had to take on additional caregiving responsibilities for children and other family members. A study by OECD in 25 member countries found that mothers were nearly three times (61.5 percent) more likely to take on the majority of unpaid care responsibilities (13). This added burden limited their ability to work or seek new employment, further affecting their livelihoods. According to a recent report by UNICEF, in the context of the pandemic, intensified care needs are met by girls pulled out of school. This has further deepened inequalities in the gender division of labour (14).

**Mental health:** In the US, the mental health gender gap increased by 61 percent (15). The combined stresses of job loss, financial insecurity, and increased caregiving responsibilities have had significant effects on women's mental health. Many have reported increased rates of anxiety, depression, and stress during the pandemic. A survey conducted across the US, UK, and Australia found that 44 percent of all respondents (male and female) reported their mental health had declined since the beginning of the pandemic, with 48 percent of women reporting these negative effects (16). While mental health issues impact all genders, it is

true that because of a culture of silence around health for women, these effects are less visible.

**Access to healthcare services:** The pandemic strained healthcare systems worldwide, and women's health services were often deprioritised. This has had lasting consequences for women's health, including delayed diagnoses and treatment for various conditions, limited access to reproductive health services, and reduced prenatal and postnatal care. In the US, an online survey of 4451 pregnant women found nearly a third reported elevated levels of stress, with alterations to prenatal appointments cited as a major reason for this elevation (17). In 118 low- and middle-income countries, it is estimated that there was reduction in antenatal care by at least 18 percent, and possibly up to 51.9 percent, and a similar reduction in postnatal care (18). This shows that health needs not directly related to COVID-19, particularly around reproductive and adolescent girl health, are deprioritised and scaled back due to the decline in the revenue from taxation. This then has led to sharp increases in chronic health risks for women.

**Gender-based violence:** Lockdowns and stay-at-home orders have led to increased instances of domestic violence against women, with many being trapped in unsafe living situations. The United Nations has consistently warned of a "shadow" pandemic of domestic violence as a result of mandatory lockdowns. Many countries registered a sharp and immediate surge in cases and calls for service, with increases ranging from 20 percent to 100 percent (19). For example, in Kenya, the number of reported gender-based violence cases in March and April 2020 increased by 300 percent compared to the same period in 2019 (20). This has had both short- and long-term effects on women's physical and mental well-being.

**Unequal access to vaccines and healthcare:** Women have faced barriers in accessing COVID-19 vaccines and healthcare services, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. During the vaccine rollout, in some countries, only one woman was vaccinated for every three men (21). These disparities have further widened the gender gap in health and livelihoods.

**Long-term consequences:** The pandemic's effects on women's health and livelihoods are expected to persist beyond its immediate aftermath. Lost income, career disruptions, and reduced access to education will have long-term consequences for women's economic stability and opportunities for growth. The long-term consequences will require targeted interventions to address gender disparities and promote women's health and economic well-being.

## Policy Recommendations

Women's lives and livelihoods are impacted by the extent to which the G20 countries implement gender-sensitive policies. These policies should address systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing healthcare services, education, and economic opportunities, as well as promote gender equality in the workforce. Some of these recommendations are discussed below.

**Direct income support to vulnerable groups:** Direct cash transfers, extended family and child benefits, tax breaks, and expanded unemployment benefits can provide tangible assistance to women and the poor. Some G20 governments are using new technologies to improve access to digital finance, but the gender gap in account ownership has increased in almost half of all G20 countries, partly because of discriminatory practices (such as banks requiring permission from husbands or fathers to approve women's loan applications) (22).

**Supporting women workforce and informal workers:** This can be done by adopting policies that bridge the gender pay gap; implementing gender responsive social protection systems, including access to employer or state-funded childcare services; adopting family-friendly policies, including flexible work; increasing the remit of social assistance programmes that largely target women, such as cash transfers and social pensions; and suspending all conditionalities for a period of time.

**Education:** Shortfalls in teachers, school infrastructure, and teaching and learning material must be redressed on a priority basis. Interventions

such as India's New Education Policy show a new way forward for the education sector. There is a need for providing required budgetary support as also investment in greater monitoring of public instruction.

**Unpaid care work:** There is a need for policies that acknowledge and alleviate the burden of unpaid care work. This can include a professionalised childcare industry that is publicly financed to provide quality and affordable care; providing essential workers with childcare services; and funding public campaigns to raise awareness on reducing the huge gender imbalance in responsibility of care.

## Conclusion

COVID-19 has shown us the devastating effects that exogenous shocks can have on women's and girls' lives and access to livelihoods. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that focuses on promoting gender equality, improving access to education and healthcare, and implementing gender-sensitive policies that support women's economic empowerment. The gendered approach and leveraging multidimensional pathways that address crosscutting issues through targeted but coordinated interventions is the pathway to achieving SDG-5 and all other SDGs. This is essential if we are to learn the right lessons from the pandemic and future-proof the lives of the most vulnerable people in society.

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# **THE MOONSHOT MINDSET: CLOSING THE GENDER GAP WITHIN A GENERATION**

SHELLEY ZALIS

**W**hen contemplating the question of what the world will look like in 131 years, our minds are filled with curiosity about our great-great-grandchildren, the state of our climate, and the potential impact of emerging technologies like the metaverse. But amid these musings, can we envision a world where every individual, regardless of gender, earns the same wage for the first time in history?

Although we have made some progress in narrowing the global gender gap, recent research suggests that, based on our current trajectory, true gender parity will not be achieved until 2154—a staggering 131 years from now (1). The World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* highlights the compounding effects of crises on women’s workforce outcomes and warns of the increasing risk of backsliding on global gender parity (2).

### **The Challenge: Closing the Global Gender Gap**

Over the past few years, we have faced extraordinary challenges. However, it is unacceptable that amidst these trials, we have allowed gender equality to become a secondary priority. Merely shaving off a few years here and there will not suffice. As we peer ahead, it is evident that we need a new approach. We must channel more energy into finding solutions and ignite a passion among leaders to close the gender gap, empowering them to leave a legacy within their lifetimes and tenures.

Throughout history, we have conquered seemingly insurmountable challenges. When confronted with disease (the COVID-19 pandemic), we rallied to create a vaccine in record time. When presented with the opportunity for innovation, we pioneered autonomous vehicles. The dedication to finding solutions and prioritising progress has consistently seen us through obstacles that once appeared insurmountable.

In the late 1960s, the world’s leading countries united in their commitment to a shared challenge—landing on the moon. Each country aspired to be the first to witness their boots touch the lunar surface.

Amidst the difficulties and uncertainties that lay ahead, they recognised an opportunity to succeed. They adopted the 'moonshot mindset'. US President John F. Kennedy famously proclaimed, "We choose to go to the moon" (3). These simple yet profound words inspired the entire nation to rally behind the cause. Faced with an overwhelming challenge, Kennedy made a deliberate choice to pursue the mission and skillfully leveraged his persuasive power to secure Congressional support and achieve this audacious goal.

Kennedy's powerful words, "If not now, when? If not us, who?" not only galvanised a nation and propelled humankind to the moon, but also forever changed our perspective on setting ambitious goals. Today, this very mindset is what we need to transform another seemingly impossible mission—the closing of the gender gap—into an imperative that sparkles with possibility.

### **The Flipping Point: A Time Ripe for Change**

The responsibility of closing the gender gap rests upon the shoulders of the CEOs who lead the most influential companies in the world. In an era when consumers demand fairness and transparency, prioritising the closure of the global gender gap is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic imperative.

Malcolm Gladwell's concept of the tipping point refers to a critical moment or threshold at which a situation or phenomenon undergoes a significant and often irreversible change (4). It is the point at which a small action or occurrence can have a disproportionate impact, leading to a cascading effect and ultimately shifting the course of events. In the context of gender equality, the tipping point could represent the moment when a critical mass of individuals, organisations, or societies collectively push for change and propel the movement towards gender parity. It signifies a turning point where the momentum for gender equality becomes unstoppable.

On the other hand, the flipping point concept refers to a transformative moment or mindset shift that prompts individuals or organisations to

adopt a new approach or perspective. It is the point at which people choose to challenge the status quo, break away from conventional thinking, and actively pursue a different course of action. In the context of closing the gender gap, the flipping point represents a conscious decision to prioritise gender equality, recognise its importance, and commit to taking tangible steps to achieve it. It signifies a shift from complacency or indifference to a proactive stance of driving change.

For the flipping point, the time has come to translate plans into action, to equalise wages, eliminate gender-based compensation disparities, enhance benefits, and provide equal opportunities for advancement into executive positions. While the specific actions may vary from one company to another, CEOs must act decisively now to implement the necessary changes and usher in an era of equality.

### **Creating a New Equality Playbook: Harnessing the Power of Women in the Workplace**

The Female Quotient is the number one end-to-end visibility platform helping women thrive in the workplace (5). It is the engine of equality for the world's greatest businesses, working with and for conscious leaders at every level, in every industry, and around the world (6). When collective, meaningful action meets the moment, where good intentions turn into intentional action, our mission to change the equation and close the workplace gender gap becomes possible and timely.

The flipping point closes the gender gap with the creation of a first-of-its-kind gender equality playbook in an ecosystem built to transform ideas into scalable solutions across the globe. The future workforce demands a workplace that is inclusively designed. Our group of CEOs will make it real.

In our ever-evolving world, maintaining productivity and attracting the future workforce will necessitate a reimagined corporate environment. Equal pay, diversity, flexibility, and equality for all will no longer be optional but rather a fundamental requirement. By championing gender



equality and taking concrete steps to achieve it, CEOs are investing in increased recruiting power and gaining a competitive advantage in the labour market. Leaders today have a unique opportunity to transform the current wave of resignations into a great reimagination of the workforce—an inclusive and equitable landscape where every individual can thrive.

Similar to the monumental achievement of reaching the moon, closing the gender gap within a generation will require our leaders to be pioneers, venturing into uncharted territories. They must be willing to explore where no one has gone before, challenging existing norms and structures. CEOs who take the leap to foster equality, diversity, and flexibility in the workplace will be the ones to set a new standard and lead the wave of change—and before long, they will not be alone. Once one leader paves the way, others will soon follow suit, collectively forging a path towards gender equality.

But before we embark on this transformative journey, we must make a conscious decision to take on the challenge. In the words of Kennedy, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard" (7). These words serve as a rallying cry, reminding us that true progress requires tackling the most difficult and complex issues head on.

The Female Quotient is fully committed to adopting a moonshot mindset in collaboration with a group of 10 visionary CEOs who are ready and willing to prioritise the mission of closing the gender gap. Through the 'Flipping Point Imperative,' this group will join forces to generate disruptive ideas and propel us into a future where the workplace is truly equitable and inclusive for all.

### **Conclusion: The Importance of Adopting a Moonshot Mindset**

Creating a gender-equal world does not require rocket science; it demands a moonshot mindset. It necessitates a collective commitment

to challenge the status quo, dismantle systemic barriers, and implement transformative measures. The journey towards gender equality will undoubtedly be arduous, but it is a challenge we must wholeheartedly embrace.

In envisioning the world 131 years from now, we dare to dream of a future where gender parity is not a distant goal but a tangible reality. We imagine a world where individuals are judged by their merits rather than their gender, where equal opportunities and fair compensation are the norm. We envisage a society where diversity is celebrated, where everyone has a seat at the table, and where the contributions of all genders are valued and recognised.

To bring this vision to life, we must act now. We cannot afford to wait 131 years for gender equality. The time is ripe for bold action, unwavering commitment, and collaborative efforts across all sectors of society. Governments, corporations, civil society organisations, and individuals must come together, united in their pursuit of gender parity.

Let us harness the power of the moonshot mindset, drawing inspiration from the audacious spirit that propelled us to the moon. Together, we can challenge the limits of what is possible and create a future where gender equality is not a distant dream but a fundamental reality. The world 131 years from now can be a place where the accomplishments of our ancestors in closing the gender gap are celebrated, where progress is measured not in decades or centuries, but in the collective strides we make towards a more just and equitable world.

In this journey, the moonshot mindset becomes our guiding star, illuminating the path forward and instilling in us the determination to overcome every obstacle. We must foster a culture of inclusion and empowerment, where diversity is seen as a strength and gender equality is championed as a fundamental value. By creating supportive environments that value the unique perspectives and talents of all individuals, we can unlock untapped potential and drive innovation that will propel us towards a more equal future.

The moonshot mindset calls for bold and audacious goals. It challenges us to think beyond incremental progress and envision a world where gender equality is not a distant target, but a reality within our grasp. Let us not be deterred by the magnitude of the task at hand, but rather let it fuel our determination to push boundaries and create lasting change.

As we embark on this transformative journey, we must recognise that closing the gender gap is not a solitary endeavour. It requires collective action, collaboration, and shared responsibility. By engaging governments, businesses, communities, and individuals, we can build a powerful movement that leaves no one behind.

The moonshot mindset is a call to action, an invitation to dream big and strive for a future where gender equality is the norm. It compels us to challenge the status quo, dismantle barriers, and create a world where every person, regardless of gender, can fulfill their potential and contribute to the betterment of society.

Together, let us embrace the moonshot mindset and work tirelessly to close the gender gap. By doing so, we will not only transform the lives of countless individuals but also shape a future that is more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous for all. The time for action is now, and the rewards of our efforts will be felt for generations to come.

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# A POSITIVE VISION OF MASCULINITY

ROHINI NILEKANI

**A**s early as 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for a change in the partnership between men and women. This declaration was signed by India, along with 188 other countries, and much progress has been made on women's rights since, especially when it comes to crucial indices such as enrolment and retention of girls in school, maternal health, and mortality, access to sexual and reproductive health, and financial inclusion. In India, I have witnessed the transformation among some of the 60 million women who are members of self-help groups, becoming more financially independent and sometimes emerging into local politics, as powerful influencers of public policy. This has resulted in more than one million elected women leaders at the *panchayat* level of government, possibly a world record. Much more remains to be done, however, when it comes to the empowerment of women, girls, and other genders. In fact, in many societies, we may be losing the gains made in the past two centuries.

This, then, is a useful moment to revisit the spirit of the Beijing Declaration. This is the time to understand the root causes of gender inequity and to pause and examine why efforts around building a gender-equitable society often omit the participation of or active engagement with boys and men, whose lives are inextricably linked to women.

## **The Challenge**

Gender equity is as important for men and boys as for women and other genders. Inequitable gender norms lead to severe negative impacts on people of all genders. While women and transpeople face violence and discrimination, barriers to livelihoods, health services, safe public spaces, and more, rigid masculine norms can put pressure on men and boys to engage in risky behaviours such as violence, unsafe sex, and substance abuse. Men often find themselves in physically and psychologically unsafe spaces, while social norms prevent them from being vulnerable or opening up about their challenges and seeking help. As a result, many men struggle to form stable, fulfilling relationships.



My attention was drawn to the issues of men and boys about seven years ago. A few instances from that time have stayed with me. One was in Ramanagara, Karnataka, when I saw a young boy crying in a public space and stopped to ask him what had happened. He was with his sister, and he was crying because although he had done very well in his 10th standard examination and wanted to study further, his father had just informed him that he had secured him a job in the local Skills Training Corporation and that he would have to join the government. There was no question about him studying further. I have spoken similarly to dozens of young men who have felt forced to follow in their father's footsteps when it came to their livelihoods.

Another incident was when our car was stopped on a busy highway by a group of young men wielding *lathis* (sticks). They were holding up traffic in frustration at a local deadly accident, but their faces were flushed with excitement and a sense of raw power. The youngest among them could not have been more than 10 or 11 years old. And there were no girls or women in that mob.

The last example is of the scene at an employment queue, where dozens of young men were waiting, praying for jobs. These were posts like security guards, sales and service agents, or others that would barely offer subsistence wages. In their eyes, I could see equal parts of hope and despair. These snapshots assemble like a gallery for me, portraying the reality faced by 200 million young men in India, between the ages of 13-25, many of whom lack adequate opportunity, employment, and dignity.

This led me to investigate which organisations are working on these issues. There were not too many when I opened up a philanthropy portfolio to work with and for young men and boys. Today, my foundation has 16 partner organisations trying innovative ways to create shared and safe places for young males who aspire to become their best selves.

In multiple accounts from our NGO partners, and through our own research, we have heard boys talk about their worries, and rue the lack of intimacy or spaces where they can be real and vulnerable. In focus

group discussions with boys in the 18-to-22-year age bracket across social classes, some said that many ideas of boyhood and manhood are forced upon them—they have to be strong, breadwinners, successful, protect and bring honour to their families, and uphold the traditions of society (1). They have to become worthy of marrying a girl by accumulating higher educational qualifications and high-paying jobs, and always doing better than their fathers.

But millions of young men simply cannot live up to these expectations. We see this even on a global scale, with the International Labour Organization calling the young men of today a scarred generation (2). Too many of them are undereducated, underemployed, and unemployable because they lack the new skills valued by the current economy, as traditional livelihoods like farming have lost their appeal. These are challenges that men face in ways unique only to them, but as Richard Reeves says, we often mistake the problem of boys and men with the problem *with* boys and men.

When we look at the lives of men and boys through the lens of data, the statistics are grim. In India, for instance, in 2021, 81 percent of all recorded accidental deaths were men; 73 percent of all suicides were male (and these numbers have jumped by an average of 25 percent since 1967) (3); 96 percent of all persons in prison are men (4); and an overwhelming majority of alcohol users are males (about 95 percent) who fall in the age bracket of 18-49 years (74 percent) (5). Anecdotally, substance abuse among boys is on the rise, with the age of initiation getting lower and lower. In education, the latest Unified District Information System for Education data shows that more than 18 percent of districts in India are reporting higher school dropout rates for boys (as compared with girls) (6). Moreover, data reports boys having higher rates of extreme stunting and wasting in comparison with girls (7).

The argument here is not that girls and women face no challenges, or that the lives of boys are worse than that of other genders. The point of presenting data about the lives of boys and men is that raising boys in a patriarchal mould is not only serving the world badly but is also coming at a high cost to them. This is something we must take a closer

look at, especially because the world is changing rapidly, and society is in a period of great transition.

### **The Role of Boys and Men in Shifting Social Norms**

This is a time for new openings, but also tremendous anxieties. Boys and men increasingly feel they have no control over their future. They are having to deal with elements in the marketplace that they have not been raised to understand—including women, technology, and climate change. At the same time, there is a lack of positive/alternative role models for many boys. How often do boys see fathers taking on household work or being the primary caregivers? Not only do social norms disallow men from stepping up to these roles, but the structural economy also prevents it. In India, fathers are entitled to only 15 days of paternity leave, compared with 26 weeks for the mother. This is even though studies show that paternity leave not only pushes fathers to assume greater parental responsibilities but also fosters better relations with and growth of the child, to say nothing of being a huge support to the new mother (8).

Without adequate structural support, the burden of livelihoods will continue to fall on men, which will in turn keep women locked in traditional caregiving roles. The falling rate of women's labour participation in India may be a wake-up call. Perhaps it is time to see gender equity as a household-level issue, where women are freed from the home so they can break ground in traditionally male-occupied spaces, and men are encouraged (and sometimes they even need permission to be so, as our informal research has shown) to be active householders. Certainly, an efficient, demand-led system of childcare, provided by both the *sarkaar* (state) and the *bazaar* (market) could be a key driver of change in the *samaaj* (society).

Without such interventions, boys are set up to continue reinforcing the archetypal macho image and pretend that everything is fine, even when it is not. When there are millions of young people who feel this way in any nation or society, it results in these young and restless men

turning inwards or outwards, possibly in violence. Recent events in India and worldwide confirm that there is indeed a backlash from increasingly insecure males of all political and religious hues. It is prudent for all of us, especially academics, policymakers, and practitioners, to pay keen attention to why that is happening, and design a non-judgemental, highly creative response to this emergence, not just in programmatic work, but within each one of us, in our homes, social groups, and in the broader polity.

### **A Call for Public Programmes for Boys and Men**

How can we better support boys and men looking for change? Civil society organisations are natural allies for this work, but public programmes can catalyse this work at scale. In our internally commissioned research, we found that in 2021, ~US\$365 million was allocated in the national budget for schemes and programmes for girls (for example, girls hostel scheme, Mission Poshan, and Mission Shakti) but no separate funding was allocated for programmes looking to intentionally engage males. In 2014, US\$3 million was allocated towards a scheme called Saksham (holistic development of adolescent boys); however, no funds were released, and the scheme was shelved.

As we continue to work for women's empowerment, can we also creatively solve this challenge of young men's empowerment? Can we design public programmes for young males? Can we innovate safe, shared spaces so that boys can talk to each other without ridicule and fear? Can we imagine social structures where young men can organise around financial and other needs? Can we make time for boys to learn about arts, sports, painting, and music, and encourage them to pursue things that help them grow as human beings?

We need to open up these conversations in our own homes, at the dinner table, or when families spend time together. We need to especially have these conversations in rooms where many men and women come from a place of privilege. While we continue to run gender sensitisation programmes on the field, in villages, and places where boys and men

sit at the intersection of many disadvantages, it is equally necessary to keep one channel open with powerful privileged men. How do men who are rich, successful, and powerful participate in the creation of a society they want for their daughters and sons? What kind of role models can they be for the next generation? How can business owners thread care and gender equity into all aspects of their factories and businesses?

This is a creative challenge for the corporate sector, which has done some credible work on empowering women at work. Now there is more work to do with men. I have met so many young men who want to enter the social sector or the corporate sector to change the way capitalism works. They could be great leaders for this societal mission.

Through my philanthropy, I support many wonderful organisations that are at the forefront of this complex work. And through them, I am learning that the discourse is indeed shifting (9). The younger generation is increasingly questioning fixed gender norms, and their conversation is platforming plurality and fluidity. Tens of millions of young men are moving onwards and outwards from where they were born or where they were stuck, to try and make something more of themselves. But they need society's help. Even if they have been brought up with certain traditional values, they are open to new norms, especially on gender issues, and like young people everywhere, they are experimenting. As the saying goes, the future is here, it is just not evenly distributed. If we support them, we can make it happen sooner than we think. Moreover, green shoots are already emerging.

Think of the small but noteworthy examples of single fathers, who are adopting children despite the difficulty the law presents them with. Think of the men entering unusual occupations in the arts or in the care economy.

And then there are the celebrities. Cricketer Virat Kohli missed three out of four test matches that were part of an important Australian tour to be with his newborn baby. He had to brave much controversy when he talked about this. Tennis players Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal cried openly in defiance of the norm as Federer retired from an illustrious

career. More and more famous and powerful men are showing younger boys that masculinity need not be a prescribed idea.

We know that there are many such good men in the world, who have silently worked on themselves and with the women in their lives to balance power better. Again, in the spirit of inclusion, of not generalising, of not lumping men together, let us acknowledge, celebrate, and ally and work with the men who are on this journey. This must be a co-powered journey for a more humane society.

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# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE GREEN TRANSITION

DAMILOLA OGUNBIYI

**T**he green transition is a whole-of-economy shift away from high carbon trajectories to economies that are energy prosperous, energy secure, and powered by sustainable energy.

The green transition must combine action on ending energy poverty and phasing out fossil fuels to deliver energy access gains while making rapid strides in clean energy solutions for power, cooking, industry, heating and cooling, and transport. It is not enough to think about shifting away from fossil fuel-based energy consumption but also to deliver green growth such that countries worldwide can participate more fully in the global market opportunity of this transition. From green manufacturing to carbon markets, countless new markets are emerging, and an inclusive green transition will be one where all countries can share meaningfully in the creation and prosperity generated from these green markets.

The green transition is relevant from the equity, justice, development, and environmental point of view. The global economy is shifting towards greener solutions, with the pace varying by sector. However, the motivations driving these shifts vary by country and sector, but all have some basis in a commitment to climate action. It is, therefore, encouraging that most countries, including G20 members, have outlined robust plans for tackling climate change in the form of nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and are working on long-term, low-carbon development strategies.

The progress made by the G20 countries to pursue their energy transitions rapidly and at scale is an integral part of the broader green transition. Some important first steps have already been taken since the G20's energy agenda launch in 2009 and continue to this day. For example, during Indonesia's presidency in 2022, the G20 adopted the Bali Energy Transition Roadmap, which laid out key priorities for a just energy transition (1). The G20 has also established work streams on some of the most pressing issues for a just and inclusive energy transition, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, a phasing-out of fossil fuel subsidies, and access to energy. These are all central steps towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

As it does on critical issues of development and financial security, the G20 must extend its leadership and support to issues of the green transition, which can no longer be seen as limited to the realm of environmental protection, but rather, as growing evidence suggests, the very foundational underpinning to growth, development, and security across all sectors. Concerted action by G20 countries can offer an essential boost to building sustainable, low-carbon energy systems globally.

India has shown that it is possible to pursue both speed and scale through its experience of rapidly making twin strides in energy access and renewable energy deployment. Moreover, India's G20 presidency has been essential for the world rather than just for itself.

### **Importance of Gender-lens Considerations in the Green Transition**

Promoting gender equity and equality is sound economics and may assist nations in addressing some of the most challenging problems, such as climate change and the green transition (2). Green jobs will be an important driver of the global energy transition.

Scientific research in other sectors has found that a diversified workforce delivers better results, not only in terms of increased creativity and innovation potential but also related to better decision-making and greater profits. Still, this potential has not yet translated into substantially narrowing the gender gap in the energy sector.

The gender gap is a crucial issue in the context of the green transition because, according to projections by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the International Labour Organization (3), 38.2 million people globally will be working in the renewable energy sector by 2030. There could be 139 million employed in the energy sector, with around 74 million in hydrogen, electric vehicles, power systems, and energy efficiency (4). The energy transition and the drive towards renewable energy present unprecedented opportunities for women.

Gender equality is essential because it is an intrinsic human right and a core development objective. It is also a critical instrument for development because it increases productivity and improves the welfare of families and children while exerting positive effects on GDP per capita. Furthermore, climate change, energy, and gender equality are inextricably linked.

Low-carbon roadmaps and sustainability strategies must include women's participation, experiences, and voices, as they have valuable points of view, experience, and knowledge to contribute to building a green economy that works for everyone.

However, the reality is that huge gaps remain in ensuring women's meaningful participation in energy planning and policymaking processes, with women being largely underrepresented in leadership positions, from corporations to the diplomatic level at international negotiations. The lack of women's participation in leadership positions is a critical underlying factor that continues to replicate gender inequalities in the global efforts to decarbonise energy systems.

### **Underrepresentation of Women in the Energy Sector**

The underrepresentation of women in the energy sector is well documented. Men outnumber women in the traditional energy industry, with women accounting for barely 22 percent of the workforce. Renewable energy does better than conventional energy, with women occupying 32 percent of jobs (5). However, when critically analysed, the renewable energy sector still has significant discrepancies; for example, the percentage of women employed in the wind energy sector is only 21 percent (6).

IRENA's latest analysis shows that 40 percent of women are employed full-time in the solar PV sector, the highest percentage of any renewable energy subsector examined thus far. However, this relatively significant participation of women still falls short of the global average for women in the economy, estimated to have reached 45.9 percent as of 2020 (7).

Moreover, even though the renewable energy sector has great potential for increased employment opportunities, women often hold secretarial and administrative positions, rather than technical and operative positions. Gender inequality within the sector is most evident at decision-making levels; for example, in the wind subsector, women hold barely 13 percent of managerial jobs and 8 percent of senior management positions (8). On the other hand, the solar PV subsector has women holding 30 percent of management positions, but this drops to 17 percent for senior management (9).

In both subsectors, the share of female managers is far below women's average share in the workforce but is similar to the overall proportion of all senior management positions, which is estimated to be 31 percent (10). However, the average proportion of women in management positions in the overall economy of the G20 countries is higher, estimated to be 38 percent in 2020 (11).

There are similarities across the globe when looking at the underrepresentation issue from a geographical lens. For example, in Australia, women constitute 38 percent of the solar PV workforce, while in Brazil and the US, the proportion is 30 percent (12). This points to the fact that the underrepresentation of women in the energy sector is a global issue that must be urgently tackled.

### **Additional Barriers to Women's Meaningful Participation in the Energy Sector**

An industry survey by IRENA found that barriers to women's meaningful participation were predominantly those associated with cultural and social norms, followed by inequity in ownership of assets and lack of gender-sensitive policies and skills (13). In addition, access to finance and the lack of gender awareness in the sector were also identified as significant challenges.

Women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses and subsequently in STEM career paths, such as

those found in the energy sector. For example, according to the American Association of University Women (14), in the US, women make up only 28 percent of the workforce in STEM, and men vastly outnumber women majoring in most STEM fields at higher learning institutions.

Apart from the labour workforce, women represent a vast reservoir of entrepreneurial potential, talent, and resilience that can ignite productive activity and anchor a path for sustainable economic development. They are well positioned to lead and support energy access through entrepreneurship and participation in energy subsector value chains, particularly for last-mile communities in rural areas.

Billions of women still do not have the same legal rights as men, and nearly 2.4 billion women of working age worldwide are still not afforded equal economic opportunities, preventing them from participating actively in the economy, notably as entrepreneurs. Some countries still have laws that prevent women from working in specific jobs or require a man's consent to such work (15).

### **Solutions and Best Practices to Increase the Participation of Women in the Green Transition**

The G20 member countries, through the 25x25 gender goal, committed to reducing the gender gap while bringing 100 million women into the labour market (16). The Women20 (W20) engagement group was set up in 2015 to implement this 25x25 gender goal commitment. This gender goal is among the first tangible commitments that the G20 put in place to increase the participation of women and foster greater inclusion.

Considerable policy action continues to take place in G20 countries and beyond to boost women's participation in the labour market and reduce gender gaps in job quality, specifically in the energy sector. For example, the Gender and Energy Compact (17) has successfully brought together governments, the private sector, academia, civil society, youth, and international organisations to address the issue of gender equality in the energy transition. Signatories to the compact have individually and



jointly committed to bringing this multistakeholder initiative to life and creating inclusive and gender-responsive energy access and transition pathways, strategies, and policies.

As part of this work, UN-Energy also monitors the gender footprint of all the 185 energy compacts, which span commitments worth over US\$600 billion. Of all the commitments, from 2021 to 2022, only 35 percent of the commitments were seen to be gender-forward, and the remaining 65 percent were gender-neutral (18). Annual monitoring outcomes continue to keep track of this progress.

Further, multiple initiatives to address some of the barriers to gender progress exist through the ‘Women and Youth at the Forefront’ programme at Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL). Together with the Clean Cooking Alliance and the Global Women’s Network for the Energy Transition, SEforALL supports a mentorship programme for early- to mid-career women working in the clean cooking sector. The last cohort that graduated in April 2023 had participants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean Islands who gained knowledge on how to be better leaders and impactful agents of change.

Furthermore, SEforALL has a ‘Women in STEM’ traineeship that provides technical training to recent or soon-to-be university graduates by having them participate in local health electrification projects, arming these young professionals with the skills and experience needed to succeed in the sector.

Other notable initiatives from across the globe include Women in Solar Energy, a network to foster diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the solar energy industry, and MESol, a Brazilian support network for women in solar energy.

## **Conclusion and Key Recommendations**

For the world to achieve the green transition, significant investment and fresh ideas are required. Women can provide some of this innovative

thinking, but only if more significant efforts are made to mainstream gender perspectives, adopt gender-sensitive policies, and tailor training and skills development to help increase women's engagement and ensure that women's perspectives are fully articulated.

Additionally, there is a need to encourage a more equal distribution of men and women across the energy sector and its subsectors by removing policies, rules, norms, and restrictions that discourage or bar either men or women from pursuing certain careers or forms of employment. Governments should concentrate on implementing legislative changes that provide enhanced social support to women and encourage women's greater involvement in the energy sector.

Finally, the green transition can open up new economic opportunities for women by supporting livelihoods and generating new sources of income. More needs to be done to empower women energy entrepreneurs, and the first step will be to remove any restrictions that impede women from actively taking part as business owners. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs require support in the form of flexible and low-cost financing, mentorship, and networking opportunities.

In conclusion, a green transition that involves the rapid shift to clean energy is an essential part of the global action needed to address the climate crisis, and we must all work together to ensure that women can take part in this critical moment in history and are also able to thrive.

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# A SNAPSHOT ON GENDER

## Social and Environmental Risks

According to UN data on SDG-5, the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Women face rampant gender discrimination, restricted access to educational opportunities, threats and instances of violence, and heightened impacts from global health, climate, and humanitarian crises.

In low-income countries, primary school completion rates are lower for girls (63%) in comparison to boys (67%)

Girls are 2-2.5x more likely to be out of school in countries experiencing conflict (90% of secondary schoolgirls)



129 million girls are out of school



1/2 billion people share sanitation facilities, and 1.4 million yearly deaths occur due to poor water and hygiene



29 million jobs expected in RE sector by 2030 with women accounting for only 32% of RE workforce today

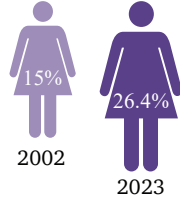


80 percent of people displaced by climate change are women

These social and environmental risks are compounded by the threats of violence and sexual harassment, and need immediate Political Intervention



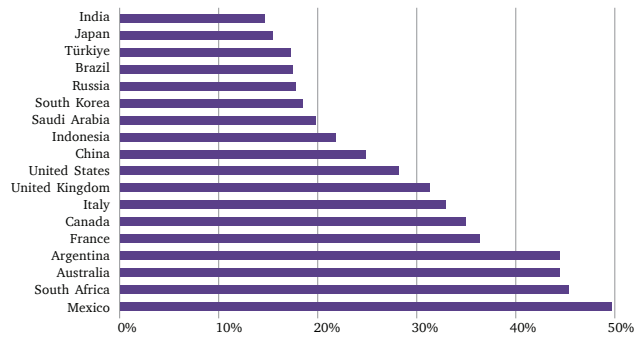
## Level of Political Intervention



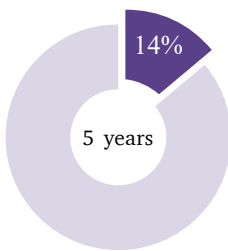
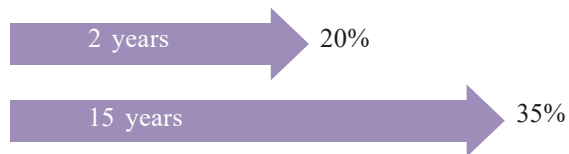
Women currently hold only 26.4% of all legislative seats globally

Among all the G20 nations, Mexico has the highest percentage of seats held by women, followed by South Africa and Australia

Women in National Legislators of G-20 Countries (2022)



Women's participation in peace processes increases the likelihood of a lasting agreement (2 years by 20% and 15 years by 35%)



Women constituted ~14% of negotiators over the last 5 years

Addressing social and environmental issues through political intervention can lead to economic development

## Women and Economic Development

Despite making up half of the world's population, women's share in global GDP is only 37%



Reducing the gender gap may boost the global GDP by 26%, adding US\$ 28 trillion to the economy



Women represent 2 out of every 5 active early-stage entrepreneurs globally



Women spend 300% more time on unpaid care work than men

## Financial Inclusion

- Globally, 65% of women have an account with a financial institution compared to 72% of men
- In 2021, a few G20 countries (Australia, Canada, France, Japan, and the UK) achieved close to 100 percent financial inclusion of women in account ownership and card usage



## Path to Purple

Represents Equality, Dignity, Hope, and Justice



At the current rate of progress, it will take us 286 years to achieve gender equality

To accelerate this progress partnerships and collaboration is the Key

## Breaking down structural barriers worldwide

### Investment & Financing

- Global cooperation and investments through increased national funding
- Focus on blended finance for gender equality

### Partnerships & Collaboration

- Strengthen the implementation through a multilateral and multistakeholder platform

### Policies & Frameworks

- Currently there are 10 goals with gender-specific indicators. A gender lens must be introduced in the remaining seven SDGs as well
- Enhanced policy roadmap for SDG-5 with aggressive targets and timelines (national and global)

### Data Availability, Monitoring and Evaluation

- Data gaps prevent trend analysis
- Increase availability of data starting at regional level



# ABOUT THE EDITORS

## Editors



**Vaishali Nigam Sinha** is Co-Founder and Chairperson of Sustainability at ReNew, a Nasdaq-listed leading global renewable energy company. She is also the Founding Chair of the ReNew Foundation, the company's philanthropic arm, driving the ReNew India Initiative for pathbreaking work in corporate social responsibility.



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