

CONFERENCE REPORT 2023

Shaping an
equiverse



24th November 2023

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the key takeaways and recommendations from the International Leadership Conference “Shaping an Equiverse: Pathways to Parity”, jointly organised by TalentNomics India and KAS SOPAS in New Delhi, India. The event was held in person on November 24th, 2023. The meeting brought 23 Global Leaders as speakers and panellists and was attended by more than 200 participants. The conference sought to discover specific policy interventions for reducing disparities and shaping a new world – an Equiverse: a Universe where gender equity is the norm.

Broad recommendations that emerged from the discussions brought out the need for an integrated approach that engages various entities, including governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals. A multi-stakeholder approach recognizes the interconnectedness of various factors contributing to gender inequalities and acknowledges that collective efforts are essential to create a more just and equitable world for our daughters and granddaughters. The discussions brought out insights and recommendations for building an Equiverse across four main dimensions – Gender equity in families, balanced workplaces, an education system that promotes gender equity, and inclusive public infrastructure.

On Building Gender Equity in Families, the panellists agreed that addressing the multifaceted aspects of patriarchy is necessary to ensure the dismantling of ingrained biases in society and fostering a more equitable and inclusive future for all. For this, the conference panellists discussed bringing about this change at three levels – dismantling debilitating Patriarchal practices in societies like FGM, dowry, and child marriage; reforming the patriarchal upbringing of girls and boys, and redistributing the unpaid care burden on women.

The second tool for gender equality that was explored was a reform of the education system and the creation of an equitable education system that focuses on equity and equality and improves the life outcomes for girls and women. The education system should also enable having critical dialogues with children, especially boys, about issues like child marriage, patriarchy, dowry, domestic violence etc. Most importantly, it is necessary to make the education policy enabling equity at the primary, secondary as well as higher education levels.

In the area of building enabling workplaces, the panellists highlighted various challenges like a high rate of drop-out of women from workplaces and leadership positions; lack of female role models etc. They also shed the spotlight on innovative measures that can be implemented to address challenges faced by women in workplaces. These points were highlighted by elucidating various innovative strategies and workplace policies by UN Women’s WEP’s signatories and at IKEA India and Apraava Energy.

As per the discussions on the pathways for making cities and urban spaces gender friendly, the urban or city infrastructure, and the transport and mobility infrastructure were the two main aspects were brought out that need to be addressed when building inclusive societies. Ways of utilising the tools of urban planning and gender budgeting were discussed, by highlighting examples and anecdotes from various cities and countries to show how public spaces, transportation, care ecosystem and workspaces can be made more gender friendly.

Preface

In our quest for moving to an Equiverse – a Universe where gender equity is the norm, we are consistently exploring the different pathways to get there.

Current data speaks volumes, revealing a stark gender disparity in accessing work, wealth, wellbeing and welfare. Female labour force participation across countries in the region, from India to Afghanistan, is low. As we navigate the complexities of building an Equiverse in South Asia, we explore the interplay of culture, societal norms, and patriarchal mindset, that leads to unequal policies, processes, laws, and infrastructure. In our ongoing pursuit of an Equiverse, we brought together eminent lawyers, educationalists, urban planners, corporate leaders, activists, social reformers and change-makers to delve deeply into the various existing challenges of gender inequity and recommend innovative solutions to build the Equiverse that we dream of.

Drawing upon the rich insights of the experts and passionate discussions with 200+ participants of our 8th Annual Conference organised in partnership with KAS Japan, we at TalentNomics India continued our journey to deepen the dialogue for moving faster towards a gender-inclusive world.

This report serves as a testament to our collective commitment to fostering gender equality. It reflects our unwavering dedication to creating an Equiverse—a Universe that not only accommodates but empowers every individual to reach their full potential and dreams, irrespective of gender.

I would like to thank Shravani Prakash for writing this report.

I would also like to thank KAS, Japan, our conference partner, and all our Equiverse Enablers—our sponsors. I especially want to extend my gratitude to our speakers and discussants for candidly sharing their experiences and recommendations.

Together, let us continue to push the boundaries of possibility, propelling South Asia towards a future where gender equality thrives in every aspect of our lives.

Warm regards,



Ipsita Kathuria
Founder & CEO
TalentNomics India

I. Introduction

The world has progressed significantly over decades and the prosperity that followed this progress has been phenomenal. However, the needle on gender inequity has, unfortunately, moved backwards and has got even worse after the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Gender Gap Report in 2023 notes that it will take 131 years for the world to achieve equity, as compared to the 100 years that were estimated in 2020! Gender inequities pervade all aspects of our lives; be it in the form of unequal workload and emotional load at home, the disparity in wealth and security, or the gap in health and wellbeing. Therefore, if we, men and women, as parents, institution builders, and policymakers, do not do some things urgently, our granddaughters and their granddaughters will also live in a world where shared prosperity remains a faraway dream.

Therefore, in 2021 TalentNomics India, in their endeavour to support a gender equitable world, introduced the concept of an Equiverse—a Universe where equity is the norm (at their Annual Leadership Conference). The following Conference in 2022 discussed how to transform the universe to be more equitable in terms of access to Work, Wealth, Wellbeing and Welfare for Women. The conferences focussed on policies needed to build an Equiverse and how each of us can be change agents given the right nudge from policy interventions in different aspects of our lives. More than 3000 men and women leaders have been involved in these discussions, both online and offline. Many of them have, in turn, become influencers in their ecosystems for greater equity. Yet, the goal of gender parity is still far, and “we have miles to go before we succeed”!

It is with this background that TalentNomics India's 8th Global Annual Conference, jointly organised with the Regional Economic Programme Asia (SOPAS) of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Japan (KAS), delved deeper into exploring pathways to achieve Gender Parity. The International Leadership Conference was held in New Delhi on November 24th, 2023, and brought together 23 Global Leaders as speakers and panellists. Over 200 participants attended the conference. The speakers and panellists included women and men from diverse backgrounds including academicians and researchers, senior industry leaders, entrepreneurs, senior leaders from Development and International organisations as well as leaders from Indian and International Non-Profit/non-governmental organisations.

The conference sought to discover specific policy interventions to foster change for reducing disparities at i) individual levels in our different avatars, as parents, partners, sons and daughters, colleagues, and leaders, ii) education institutional levels as students, teachers, influencers, and policymakers, iii) as employers and leaders providing work opportunities and (iv) at societal levels, in urban areas.

The event delivered knowledge and insights on the focus issues through structured discussions between experts and practitioners, storytelling, experience sharing, best practice dissemination as well as engagement with participants through Q&As and polls. The conference was divided into seven sessions, which included a Keynote address, a Valedictory session and four-panel discussions with experts.

AGENDA

SESSION 1 – Introduction and Opening Remarks	Ipsita Kathuria and Rabea Brauer introduced the conference by giving a background to the concept of Equiverse and sharing the motivation driving their collective commitment to shaping a more equitable future.
SESSION 2 – Keynote: Gender Parity for Sustainability	In her keynote speech, Andrea Wojnar gave personal anecdotes and highlighted the need to invest in women's sexual and reproductive health; allow them to make decisions; and free them from physical and mental abuse.
SESSION 3 – Balancing the Scales: Building Gender Equity in Families	The panellists brought out personal anecdotes from their childhood and family lives to showcase various challenges women face in patriarchal setups and how they deal with them. They discussed the various ways in which these “sticky” and persistent challenges prevent women from participating in the productive labour force, and shared their insights about the real solutions that can help change mindset in families and impact the society at large.
SESSION 4 – Pioneers of Parity: Perks of Balanced Workplaces	Panellists from UN Women India, IKEA India and Apraava Energy elucidated various innovative strategies and workplace policies that their organisations have successfully implemented to enable women to be hired and to grow in their careers.
SESSION 5 – Education for Equity: Leveraging the Digital Era	Panellists highlighted the power of education and the various ways in which girls’ education has been able to overcome the strangleholds of patriarchy. They further highlighted that to fully unleash its power, further changes are needed in the education system in terms of editing the curriculum and pedagogy, safe infrastructure to access to education, teachers mindset finding avenues for education for women from the 25–50 age group, as well bringing in affirmative action.
SESSION 6 – Redefining Urban Spaces: Building Safe and Smart Cities	Panellists discussed the pathways for making cities and urban spaces gender friendly, by utilising the tools of urban planning and gender budgeting. They highlighted examples and anecdotes from various cities and countries to show how public spaces, transportation, care-ecosystem and workspaces can be made more gender friendly.
SESSION 7 – Closing Manifesto: Shaping the Equiverse: What's in our control	Ashok Alexander elucidated challenges facing women at the grassroots and of sex workers, and the impact that enabling actions by NGOs and non-profits has played in alleviating their problems and empowering them to lead a more wholesome life.

2. Background

"At a time when the World is increasingly moving towards conflict and chaos, when progress harmony and peace are paramount, achieving gender equality is no longer just a moral imperative but it is necessary for building a sustainable World." – Ipsita Kathuria

The world has shown significant strides towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Many women have come up in all fields – politics, business, sports, arts etc. But there are persistent challenges for them to get there. We need to confront these challenges. Closing the gender gap is not just an aspiration, it is an imperative now for a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Three broad arguments for gender equality were presented at the conference:

- **Human rights** – It is the right of every individual to have equal economic opportunities irrespective of gender, caste, class, religion etc. However, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in India is 22% according to the World Bank and 35%+ according to the domestic PLFS (Periodic Labour Force Survey) data – either way, it is very significantly below the global average of 48% and men's labour force participation rate of 75%. As the data shows, women are deprived of part of their human rights due to their hampered access to economic opportunities.
- **Sustainability** – Women spend 90% of their income on the education, nutrition and sanitation needs of their families and communities. Therefore, investment in women leads to development in human capital formation, economic growth, positive nutrition and education outcomes for the whole country.
- **Business case** – There is substantial evidence to show that diversity, equity, and inclusion enhance productivity, promote innovation and growth, and strengthen brand recognition.

"Gender equality is not just a moral imperative but a vital lynchpin for achieving economic stability and macroeconomic performance" – Nitya Mohan Khemka

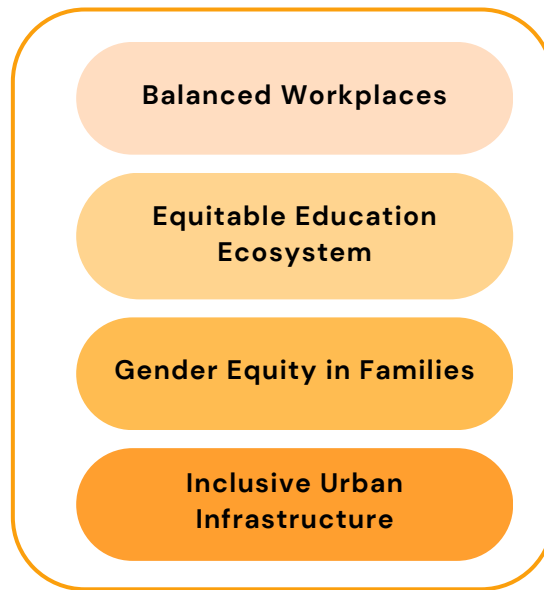
The United Nations has called for a decade of action for sustainable development. India is at the epicentre as it has the largest population and largest female population in the world. Therefore, through our actions, we can change the face of the world just by sheer numbers.

"Countries with the greatest gender equality enjoy the greatest peace and sustainable development." – Andrea M. Wojnar

Each one of us has a role in building a more equitable world. We need to create ripples of change and change the DNA of thinking. Although government institutions have a role to play in nudging us towards an equitable society, it is ultimately the responsibility of us all. It requires the commitment and engagement of every individual and each of us can play a role as a parent, policymaker, teacher – whichever role we hold in society.

The following sections elucidate the insights and recommendations for building an Equiverse brought out during the discussions at various sessions of the conference, across four main dimensions (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Four Pathways to Parity



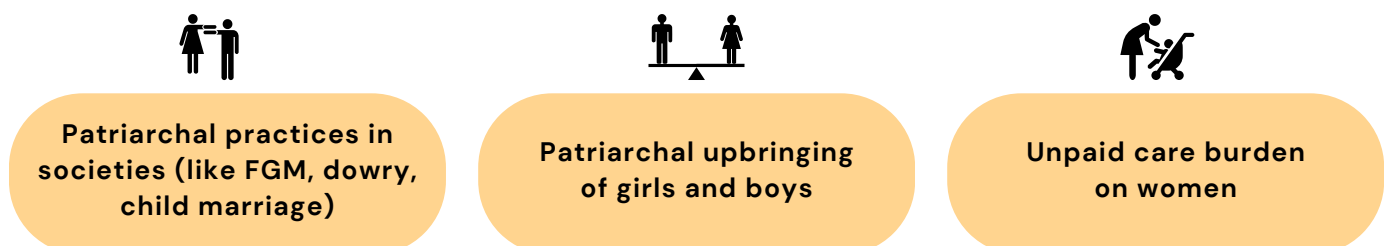
3. Balancing the Scales: Building Gender Equity in Families

Patriarchal norms and practices have been the origin of deeply entrenched gender disparities, contributing to the justification of unequal power dynamics and restricting the agency of women within communities. And patriarchal upbringing wields a profound influence on the mindset of both girls and boys, shaping their perceptions and expectations from an early age. Societal expectations often dictate traditional gender roles, prescribing specific behaviours and responsibilities for each gender.

Girls may be subtly encouraged to prioritize nurturing and caregiving roles, while boys might be nudged towards leadership and assertiveness. These ingrained norms contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, limiting the aspirations and opportunities of individuals based on their gender. This has led to the burden of unpaid work disproportionately falling on women within patriarchal societies. This unequal distribution of domestic labour not only hampers women's professional growth but also reinforces their subordinate status expectations that place the onus of maintaining a household squarely on women.

Therefore, by addressing these multifaceted aspects of patriarchy, societies can work towards dismantling ingrained biases and fostering a more equitable and inclusive future for all. The conference panellists discussed bringing about this change at three levels (Chart 2).

Chart 2 – Facets of Gender Inequities in Families



3.1 Ending Debilitating Patriarchal Practices

One of the most important changes needed on this front is to ensure women have bodily autonomy and can exercise rights and choices concerning their bodies. For example, many girls are forced to have sexual relations, have children, and produce a boy child. Many almost die, because they can't seek healthcare because they don't have access to family resources.

Patriarchal practices like Female Gender Mutilation (FGM) are still prevalent in Africa, the Middle East, and India. It is not a religious or cultural practice nor is it good for health, but followed as a result of skewed gender norms and women's role in society. Women who undergo FGM are agonised during every menstruation, urination, and sexual intercourse; they have obstructed labour during childbirth that causes debilitating, lifetime faecal and urinary incontinence; and mothers and babies face the risk of dying. It also causes mental stress, depression, and post-traumatic disorder. Women have rights to the highest healthcare – and those subject to FGM have this right denied to them.

“Without control over your own body and fertility then how can you be educated or pursue a career?” – Andrea M. Wojnar

Following were some insights shared by panellists on actions that are needed to eradicate such patriarchal practices –

- **Provide women with their rights** – We need to invest in the sexual and reproductive health of women, listen to them at all levels, and make sure they are free – from physical and psychological abuse within their homes and outside. Implementation of the law on the minimum age for marrying girls should be more stringent. Women should be able to decide if and when to have sexual relations, with whom, when to initiate, whether to use contraceptives and to seek healthcare when needed.
- **Provide women safety** – Women at all levels must enjoy bodily autonomy, which is necessary for their physical and mental safety. For physical safety, they need to be able to participate fully in decision-making in all spaces. Today, even accomplished women in their own space are not safe from the destabilizing impact of harassment. This is not conducive to effective labour force participation as sexual harassment impacts the entire chain of productivity in India and elsewhere. Laws and their implementation regarding eve teasing, and stalking both physical and electronic should be enforced and communicated widely.
- **Enable women with laws and policies** – We need more stringent laws and policies to protect any form of violence against women. For example, we still don't have laws against marital rape. Without laws, women don't have a voice or recourse. And women also need greater access to information about laws and policies as most people don't know the existing laws. Implementation of the laws should be consistent for all categories of people.

- **Encourage local NGOs and international organizations to partner to change societal mindsets** – For example, UNFPA is leading a project where adolescent girls in Orissa are trained as disaster response leaders and first responders to coastal flooding and other emergencies. They are thus fighting to grow up as equals, to have mobility and safety in their environments, and to participate in their community's response to a disaster. This has led to mindset changes for the girls and the community.

3.2 Making the Family Upbringing more Enabling for girls and boys

“Family is an intimate oppressor and one the biggest oppressors of women.”
– Vani Subramanian

Family values and practices, that are influenced by patriarchal norms, often play a big role in shaping the mindsets of girls and boys. This was illustrated by excerpts from an interview of a high schooler in a Delhi school, which is representative of a significant section of Indian society– *“In my family, I see there are societal expectations related to gender. My mother takes care of all household chores while my dad is the primary breadwinner. I am passionate about a career in engineering but often hear views from elders that the best profession for a woman is a teacher in a school so that they can take care of the house and family. But they don’t say such things about my brother’s career. As a girl, I am told that I need to learn cooking but the same is not expected of my brother.”*

Therefore, sensitisation of mindsets and in-family teaching is an extremely vital step for creating an enabling environment for women.

To bring a change in the way families treat their boys and girls, the following were some insights brought out by the conference speakers –

- **The mindset of parents needs to become enabling** – A secure, violence-free, and stable childhood for girls builds resilience to face the challenges of the future. For example, Andrea M. Wojner described her liberal upbringing – *“My parents were public school teachers. In my house, my duty was to set the table while my brothers had to wash the pots and pans. My mother prepared dinner but my father often started the crock-pot early in the mornings. Me and my four brothers were held to the same level of academic excellence. Growing up in that environment gave me a distinct outlook on what women should be.”*

“The power to make a choice is the biggest power for a woman – that power lies within family systems to give young girls.” – Sumitra Mishra

- **Policy support can empower women** – Laws and policies may not have a significant direct impact on how family values and girls’ empowerment are shaped. However, certain policy programs and schemes can indirectly support women to become independent and break norms. For example, government-funded working women’s hostels are needed because the legitimacy of a hostel with established safe infrastructure enables a woman to move out of the house to live in another city for work or education.

- **Girls themselves need to take bold actions for change** – Girls who break norms and fight for their rights not only create a path for themselves but create a ripple of change for girls who can follow in their footsteps.

For example, Sumitra Mishra narrated how she set an example for her younger cousins and siblings by breaking various gender stereotypes and expectations that came from being part of an upper caste and educated, yet traditional joint family from a small town – *“I feel obliged that my mother fought my first battle to get my education in an English medium school, which was not the norm for girls in the family. After that, I not only became the first girl to study in a co-education school but also the first girl to step out and study in a hostel outside the state. While I got married at an early age to a person of my family’s choice, I again became the first person in the family to ask for separation and divorce (10-15 years after marriage). I also broke norms by living with a partner post my separation!”*

- **Quality needs to be ensured in education** – An equitable education system helps create the right mindsets needed to change patriarchal norms within families. This is discussed in detail in the following section of education.

3.3 Address the Unpaid Care Burden on Women

After getting married, women’s aspirations are often curtailed by the burden of domestic chores, childcare, and eldercare. Women in India work almost 9 times more than men on unpaid care and domestic work. This burden is seen by women of all income classes and sections of society. However, women informal workers (like construction workers, tea garden workers, brick kiln workers, domestic workers, etc.) face a far worse challenge. These women don’t have a choice but to work to survive. They, therefore, are faced with a triple burden of paid work, unpaid domestic work, and care work. They also have to battle with males every day to work, make dangerous choices for childcare, and make compromised choices for older children’s education. So in fact, there is a “sticky floor” that is a barrier for these women.

Following were insights shared by the conference speakers on actions that can address the caregiving challenge for women –

- **Encourage men and husbands to become enablers** – Men should learn housework and it should be everybody’s work. Apart from sharing the burden of care, husbands also need to mentally, physically, and emotionally support their wives to build their careers, especially during challenging times.

For example, Shilpa Ajwani illustrated how her husband supported her when she had to return to work just 3 months after having a baby. She noted that *“while I was emotional and doubtful about leaving my baby to return to work, my husband supported me by pointing out that a few years down the line she should not feel that the baby was the reason she had quit. While we faced the challenges of being a nuclear family and there was no reliable access to daycare/creche or reliable nannies, my in-laws and parents helped out.”*

“In nuclear families, the only support structure you have is each other and if you don’t support each other’s aspirations, ambitions, hopes, and expectations of a partner, then you’ll be in trouble.” – Jyoti Sagar

Education, parenting, and family level changes are important factors that determine if a spouse has an equitable mindset towards his wife. Jyoti Sagar noted, *“My upbringing shaped what we did together as a couple”*. He illustrated this fact by showing how he has been an enabling and supportive husband to a successful wife and attributed this to conversations he heard as a child. His mother lost her father early, became the main breadwinner for her siblings, and then fast-tracked the completion of her education – so thereby she instilled in her children that women can do it and are equal in every way. His parents were primary school teachers and he had three sisters who were treated equally to him and were equipped to stand on their feet to face the world.

- **Implement policy actions for building an enabling care–ecosystem**

1. Maternity benefits or childcare provisions can be made transformative. It should not be about women workers wanting childcare as then it becomes a cost. The benefits should be available for all workers and employees wanting childcare as children belong to fathers also.
2. Also, building accredited creches or baby centres with trained nannies is extremely vital to enable women to step out to work. And there is a need to provide quality childcare even for women informal workers.
3. Focusing on the implementation of laws and policies is also extremely important as sometimes policies can be circumvented, so for example, at the village panchayat level in India, there is a reservation for women to take up positions as the Pradhans (Head of the Panchayat) but often the women are just in name while the pradhan patis (husband) become the real head.
4. There is a need for public support systems and shelter homes for vulnerable women and children who are not in a good state and those who want to get away from inequitable or unsafe families.
5. Housework and caregiving need to be monetised. UNFPA does work on National Transfer Accounts with Governments, which is about taking into account women's work and trying to monetise that as it needs to be valued.

“Gender equity in families is necessary for successful workplaces – because women succeed at work better if they have supportive husbands, and fathers who are equal domestic partners who role model equity for their children, thereby shaping expectations of the future workforce. Men who equally share unpaid work at home and aren’t afraid to ask for and talk about why they need flexibility in their work schedule also contribute to building equitable workplaces.”

– Heena Handa
(Quoting a Harvard study)

4. Education for Equity: Leveraging the Digital Era

“Education for equity doesn’t mean that only access to education should be equitable but it should also impact life outcomes equally.” – Shreyasi Singh

In an era when digital tools and platforms possess transformative powers, it is crucial to also examine the role of fostering a bias-free education. The conference panellists brought out several insights on persistent challenges and innovative solutions that can enable such equity in education. They delved into what educational policy reforms could be adopted to achieve gender equality, what systemic inequalities are entrenched in patriarchal views that impact education environments, and what best practices can we draw on by exploring interventions and policy measures.

Best Practices from Sweden’s Education System Narrated by Rabea Brauer

Countries like Sweden have incorporated gender equity directly through their education policies, be it through curriculum design, teacher training, or encouraging co-education. Such policy measures in Sweden include –

- equal opportunities for students/children across socioeconomic backgrounds
- low tuition fee for all
- higher representation in STEM fields by looking at their curriculum
- promoting the presence of girls in STEM education by establishing more educational establishments, handing out IECT equipment fairly
- better networking with women professionals
- cross-country mentoring scheme for female role models
- mandatory internships in business for women

The panellists at the conference discussed ideas for bringing equity into education at three levels – school and primary education, higher and professional education, and digital platforms for continued education.

4.1 School and Primary Education

In terms of enrolment, India now has more enrolment of girls than ever before in all segments of education. However, education mirrors society, and issues stemming from society’s patriarchal norms continue to plague the education system. Glaring inequities persist in India’s education system in primary and secondary schools. The issues are cross-cutting but are especially challenging for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

The higher enrolment rates of girls have not led to changes in life outcomes for girls. Schools may give academic skills but don’t empower girls to believe that they are equal and can use those academic skills for themselves.

Even though gender scans have been done of the curriculum to weed out patriarchal content, there has yet not been much effort towards directly challenging patriarchy in the school curriculums or teachers' mindsets. Schools are doing very little to counter patriarchal and societal norms that hold girls back. Most times the schools still do not question or intervene to prevent girls from dropping out due to child marriage. Neither are the school teachers advocates of girl's rights nor do they teach girls to be advocates of girl's rights. They are not stopping or challenging the toxic masculinity that gets shaped in boys in the classrooms.

“Since we don’t teach girls lessons of equality to believe that they are equal – women never feel they are equal despite being qualified until they think they can carry the burden of care work.” – Urvashi Sahni

Following are some suggested actions that were brought out during the discussions, which could help directly address the patriarchy in school education –

- **Redefine “quality education” to focus on equity and equality** – While the focus has been on enrolment, the critical thing is access to good quality education – “the what of education”, which should include “inclusion” and “gender sensitisation”. Quality education should lead to quality of life, teach life lessons, and teach about equality and social justice. We have to teach our children how to fight and get rid of the patriarchal structures and provide them the tools to deconstruct them in their heads, lives, and families.
- **Have critical dialogues** – It is important to have critical dialogues with children about issues like child marriage, patriarchy, dowry, domestic violence, and power structure in the family or society. Girls are not taught to question those, neither doing that directly nor tacitly. It is important to teach the girls that they have the right to protest and build an agency.
- **Intervene outside the classroom** – While enrolment is not an issue right now, attendance is still a persistent problem when it comes to girls’ education. We also need to look at and analyse the data on not just enrolment but also participation. While data proves that enrolment at the primary level up to grade 5 is on track, after grade 5 and at the 10+ level there is a steep decline in the continuity of education as participation in school declines. Girls miss school or drop out completely in situations requiring them to do caregiving roles, like when the mother or siblings are sick or if the mother dies. Girls also drop out when they get married early because of poverty or societal norms. Therefore, schools not only need to work in the classroom but also what is happening outside, they intervene to find out if a child is missing or absent.

*“I came across a school headmaster who said all girls must be promoted even if they don’t know the alphabet because they need at least a Class 5 certificate to get married.”
– Urvashi Sahni*

Study Hall Educational Foundation (SHEF), founder by Dr. Urvashi Sahni, has built a feminist pedagogy curriculum for girls and boys. They impart it in their schools as well as in many government schools. They also train teachers for this. The vision for the organisation is to educate everyone for gender equality, social justice, personal flourishing and active democratic citizenship.

- **Have critical dialogues with boys** – It is important to educate the boys in their formative years. Mothers and fathers have to do their bit but school plays a large role in impacting the mindset of boys. So we need to rethink critical dialogues with boys and engage with them more deeply. Boys often think that they're being blamed. So it is important to teach boys that patriarchy is not their fault, yet it's not good for their sisters, mothers and aunts; and not good for them too. Boys need to be allowed to grapple with patriarchal notions, build empathy personally with women in their lives and be made to think for themselves about what they can do to change patriarchal practices. And even if they don't "get it" at first, there is a need to persist and do it again and again. For this, space needs to be created in the classroom for them to do so and make it part of the official curriculum. Role plays and sensitisation chapters will also be effective tools for this.
- **Provide real opportunities in the classroom** – Classrooms need to become centres of providing the quality education needed to teach lessons of equality. Classrooms abound with opportunities, like drama, which give children a safe space with no direct consequences to rehearse or to send out messages to their families or societies.

"The classroom should provide the opportunity for children to participate in the teaching-learning and pedagogical processes." – Ramachandra Rao Begur

An example of a successful pilot of creating a protective learning environment in the classroom –

Narrated by Ramachandra Rao Begur

The Government of India and State Governments have introduced activity-based learning, which is a way that has brought the move to the participative teaching-learning process. In this case, the teacher is a facilitator while there is an opportunity for children to interact among themselves and also provides an opportunity to go through graded way/individual learning. Such initiatives like activity-based learning have led to a change in classroom dynamics, addressing the qualitative aspects.

- **Enable girls' physical access to education** – Schools have to ensure the safe transport of girls even when travelling from home to school. There are programs now called "school safety and security", where safety has been taken care of at scale and pilots have been introduced where transport facilities have been given in some states.

- **Create diversity in support systems** – Inspection authorities and officers are largely men. Increased participation of women in providing support would be greatly beneficial.
- **No one-size-fits-all approach** – Some pilots and examples can be scaled up. However, they should not be scaled up blindly but should be looked at as context-specific requirements. We need to ask if our policy framework includes the pluralistic needs of society/education. We also need customized and programmatic approaches and strategies. Another example is to include children with special needs or look at language issues of children in our plans of the pedagogical process. Certain things also require real differential strategies keeping local contexts in mind.
- **Use technology** – Technology-based platforms are proving effective channels of imparting key education and impacting the mindsets of young people. For example, UNFPA has enabled the creation of a digital platform for unpacking adolescent sexuality and helping girls and boys discover themselves by asking questions and getting accurate answers in a private safe space. Women and girls are thus leveraging education for equity by breaking taboos and leveraging education for equity by breaking barriers to adolescent sexuality and life skills.

Examples of using platforms to enable shaping children’s mindsets – examples that can be scaled up –

Narrated by Ramachandra Rao Begur

Meena Manchas are adolescent school platforms where groups of young children discuss issues like education, health, nutrition, digital safety, etc. It allows them to express freely their challenges in terms of the beliefs that they have picked up at home as well as what they encounter at the school level. The platforms provide fair opportunities and encouragement for both girls and boys to speak. The idea is to build critical dialogue in terms of looking at the belief systems and their point of view.

Such discussions enable them to (1) slowly navigate into creating awareness about issues like gender (2) freely express themselves and their point of view, and (3) learn to negotiate and talk about what they are taught at the school level is different from what’s happening at home.

- **Make the education policy enabling** – The education policy needs to enable dealing with gender issues and patriarchy directly and tacitly in the curriculum by creating a gender-sensitive curriculum that teaches girls that they are equal and they have a right to everything. In addition, training to change the mindset of teachers and administrators to treat all students equally and not perpetuate the patriarchal norms in schools is much needed.

Panellists highlighted that India’s New Education Policy (NEP) does include the requirement to bring in gender equity and parity by focussing on ‘**Equitable and Inclusive Education**’. It provides for setting up a Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF), especially for girls and transgender students, and has also taken into account the concerns of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, which includes females.

However, the panellists opined that the policy does not move beyond “philosophizing or advising” although they have the power to do much more. For instance, there was a need to go beyond focussing on infrastructure and NEP could have provided that opportunity. It could have also addressed the “quality” issues required by bringing in gender negotiations within the curriculum for changing beliefs and expressions. While the NEP says “great importance is given to gender equality”, we need to change the language to “gender-sensitive curriculum”.

Also, gender education is needed from class 1 as an official and necessary part of the curriculum with well-trained teachers who can facilitate these critical dialogues.

Policies also need to focus on the secondary education of girls and specifically on participation and retention as well.

4.2 Higher and Professional Education

“Unless we have greater diversity in education, people will not understand empathy or gender issues at work...because later when you go out to work, 50-60% of your consumers are women.” – Maheshwer Peri

To address inequities in higher education, it was suggested that we need to work on introducing enabling policy actions, like –

- **Affirmative action** – In the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), the number of girls in 2016 was 10%, but after the IIT council created a 20% super numeric seats reserved for girls, the number of girls increased from 1000 in 2017 to 2990 in 2022. Similarly in the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), the number of girls increased after some IIMs voluntarily took affirmative action and created a 30% compulsory reservation. Therefore, affirmative action like giving policy-mandated quotas (30%) will help. What is needed is to create a secure space where come what may, deserving girls will get enrolment regardless of their affordability, or other parameters.
- **Address mobility challenges** – Many of the professional colleges are in more remote areas and less accessible, so parents prefer not to send girls there. Girls tend to study in neighbourhood colleges only.
- **Focus on diversity in professional education** – We need to have greater diversity across the board, not just in higher education but also in professional education. Currently, in higher education, there is a 51-49 ratio in favour of girls. But in professional education, the ratio falls to 40 girls to 60 boys. 66% of Postgraduate students are girls but only 41% of students pursuing professional degrees are girls (as per AISHER data).
- **Build diversity of staff** – In India, women vice-chancellors are 7%, as compared to the UK where 48 women are vice-chancellors out of 100.

- **Make education affordable** – Affordability is a key criterion for girls. More girls study in government colleges as compared to similar programs in private colleges because of affordability. Sons are allowed and funded to go to private colleges while girls have to secure a place in the government colleges (Analysed from AISHER data).
- **Make ratings inclusive** – In ranking/rating/accreditations given by the Government of India, one criterion can be added to give weightage to inclusivity (geographical, socioeconomic, and gender).

4.3 Digital Platforms for Professionals

Digital platforms and online Ed-tech platforms can contribute to more gender-equitable education. Technology platforms can affordably and efficiently mainstream important education. High-quality online education is very effective and online AI is one technology that platforms can use. The curriculum can be made sharper, more personalized, and more precise. Affordability is a problem because fewer women spend money on skilling themselves, so making things affordable and viable is a big advantage.

Post-COVID, access to education increased much more and we even realised online can do certain things that offline can't. More girls enrolled in professions like hospitality (because the problem of remote location colleges is not there). This will lead to mindset changes.

We have to think of women's education from the ages of 25 to 40 as well, and can't stop at 21 years. Using Ed-tech platforms, women are upskilling online to return to work at the same or higher salaries than what they left the workforce. In addition, we need scaled career counselling and coaching for women which they can access.

5. Pioneers of Parity: Perks of Balanced Workplaces

It has now been proven that building gender-diverse workplaces is crucial for fostering innovation, creativity, and overall organizational success. By creating an inclusive atmosphere that values and respects individuals of all genders, companies can tap into a broader talent pool and enhance their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing global landscape. Diverse teams are known to be more innovative and better equipped to solve complex problems. Additionally, gender diversity contributes to improved employee satisfaction and retention, creating a positive and supportive work culture. Therefore, fostering gender diversity is not just a matter of fairness; it is a strategic imperative that positively impacts organizational performance and long-term sustainability.

However, building gender diversity is challenging. Organisations face several hurdles in their endeavour to hire, retain and promote women; and achieving the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals requires a high level of creativity, tenacity, and perseverance.

“Women's careers have become the greatest obstacle course in history.” – Shreyasi Singh

While in many entry-level segments, women make up 40–45% of the workforce, only 5% of CEOs in India are women, 8% of CFOs in India are women, and only 10% of all management positions are held by women. Research by Harappa (an Ed-tech platform) on Indian women professionals showed that out of 6 different segments, the largest pay gap was right at the top for CXOs – Women CXOs were earning 74 paise to 100 paise of males at the CXO level.

The panellists at the conference brought out insights on some of these challenges that face women in the workplace –

- **There is a high rate of drop-out of women from workplaces** – As seen in India and globally as well, women tend to leave the workforce for 4 reasons (Shilpa Ajwani)

1. Marriage
2. Motherhood
3. Mobility restrictions
4. Micro-aggressions at work and home

These myths have continued forever but whose narrative needs to be changed. For instance, one myth is that *“women leave the workforce because there is a glass ceiling”*. The reality however is that there is a *“broken rung”* right in the middle, where most women tend to leave the workforce after the 1st born because society, family, and organisations are not willing to give them that extra support that a person who has given birth to a new life deserves (as per a report from Princeton)

Another myth is that after women have babies, they get less committed to their work and demand all possible flexibilities. However, McKinsey’s study found that it is both men and women want flexibility from their organization. While it is not women alone who demand flexibility women are branded as if they are hankering for special favours, playing the victim card.

- **Exodus of women from leadership positions** – There is a glass cliff. Very senior women who have transcended the glass ceiling are leaving the workforce at twice the pace that senior men are. Many women leaders have been giving up and quitting at the political level, C-suit and on boards because women are burning out with the triple burden, which is not easy to carry. In peaking careers at around the 40–50 age group, they are burnt out and leave to take a break.
- **Work-life balance** – Women are put through competitive standards at home, which creates additional pressures for them at the workplace. Performance-wise women are equal to men. But often they can’t and don’t prioritise their careers with as much attention as needed. Workplaces are already biased and toxic for women and create pressure in addition to the pressure from home.
- **Lack of female role models** – When fewer women are shining examples out there, the ones coming after don’t have people they can relate to and give up.

They also shed the spotlight on certain measures that can be implemented to address challenges faced by women at workplaces –

- **Mentoring** – Formal mentoring push-throughs till they become the norm. Formal mentorship programs within organizations are necessary to re-engineer mindsets until mentoring becomes a natural way of life. But we need an explosion of mentorship for tangible changes.
- **Leadership** – Conscious leadership can make a huge difference – right from the hiring process to the onboarding to developing to retaining – all of this can be made gender inclusive if it is a leadership mandate. If gender equity and inclusion are made a business priority and all managers are held accountable, the message will trickle down fast and a culture change will happen.
- **Career breaks** – Women’s work must be thought of with a 40-year lens, in which case a 3–4-year break should not become a deadly blow to their career, as it currently does.
- **Training** – It is important to train managers, but it is also vital to keep having critical dialogues with them to make people feel equal and show that they belong. The process of educating everyone in the organisation should be continuous.
- **Technology** – Gig workplaces and remote opportunities are helping army spouses or women who travel with spouses often to places where they can’t get work, to get global data jobs. Portals are seeing an increase in the uptake of women who otherwise can’t access full careers.
- **Information** – It is important to find ways to keep women professionals (whether in or out of the workforce) sharp on the global trends and changes in the work economy to understand where are the real opportunities. Women professionals have a very limited view of what are the real opportunities for them. No one to discuss or speak with them about these nor do they often take the initiative to keep updated. So we need scaled counselling with some diagnostics to tell them their strengths and opportunities – an area where technology can play a very important role.
- **Allyship for leaders and managers** – We have to begin at the top. Everyone who's a people leader should go through training on allyship.

“Commitment at the highest level is non-negotiable – walking the talk is vital.”

– **Suhela Khan**

- **Women Leaders as role models** – When there are more women leaders where decisions are being made, it has a trickle-down effect as they become natural role models. When Shilpa Ajwani realized the reasons that women quit the workforce, she decided two things – i) she would take on the mantle of being a role model and mentor to many women working with her and ii) she would not give up – for her sake but also for the sake of many others. She decided to take DEI not as words but as her life's mission– She says she entered organizations that had 15–20% women but by the time she left, they had become 50–50.

During the conference, three interesting case studies were presented to illustrate policies and actions that corporate workplaces can take to enable women, under their DEI buckets and beyond.

Case Study 1:

Progress made by companies that are signatories to UN Women's WEP

UN Women engages with private sector organizations with 7 Women Empowerment Principles (WEP) to guide companies on how to strengthen their marketplace, workplace, and community interventions from a gender perspective. It is a voluntary commitment by the CEO of a company. Currently, there are 8000 CEOs globally that have committed to Women's Empowerment principles of which 380 signatories are from India.

Insights collected from primary surveys and secondary data collected from these companies show commitments translating into action in terms of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and all companies have demonstrated an increase in commitment.

- Since 2018, there has been an 186% increase in CEOs signing up to WEP in Asia Pacific (compared to 166% globally). 94% of participants said they are doing it because gender equality and women's empowerment are the right thing to do, and it contributes to key internal and external business objectives. This is happening because of the engagement of top CEOs.
- Out of 115 companies in Asia Pacific that are WEP awardees, 56% of awardees have a workforce of at least 50% women. 51% have at least half of management positions taken up by women. 76% have formal criteria to promote gender equality in the selection, hiring, promotion and retention training processes. All provide maternity leave and 57% have aligned or gone beyond the ILO convention on maternity protection.
- But significant progress is left and there is much work left to do. Very few of these companies provide a phased return to work options after maternity or paternity leave nor provide on-site clean and safe childcare facilities or subsidies for offsite care. Most do not have a formal paternity leave policy. Few have a zero-tolerance policy for violence and harassment. Very few offer flexible hours or telecommuting.

Case Study 2:

IKEA – Creating a better everyday life for everyone

IKEA built its idea of Equity and Equality around three movements – business culture, coworkers and society.

I. Business and Culture

Gender equity is a business plan, people strategy, and non-negotiable. They have embedded equality in their culture. People are at the heart of everything they do. All discussions and decisions end with assessing how it will benefit everyone in society or co-workers within the organization. Mindset changes are given to make everyone believe and understand why they are doing this – it is ingrained in everyone that it is good for business and good for society. It is a people movement – every worker from the ground level to the CEO talks the same language, understands it, and aligns towards it.

II. Co-workers

Out of 2700 workers in India, 45% are women and IKEA has 59% women at the country management level. These numbers were achieved because they have found ways of strengthening these objectives through all phases of a co-worker's life cycle – recruitment, performance management, and beyond.

Following are some good practices that IKEA followed to achieve these numbers –

- **Inclusive recruitment process** – there have to be 50-50 applications for all functions. Even if they are not able to initially find women candidates, they have made a conscious effort to look and not stop with whoever is available. They encourage all co-workers to create mindset shifts where they don't try to rush to get new talent but challenge themselves to honour commitments. Equal participation from male managers and coworkers enables them to step up to carry the load to wait for the right talent to come in. Sometimes they hire women even if they do not have all the skills but if they have the motive, intent, and passion to learn.
- **Succession planning** – everyone needs to have women as part of their succession planning and they go through that leadership training as well.
- **Training** – if any training programs are announced where there is no equal participation from women then they cancel those training.
- **Processes and policies are equal for everyone** –
 1. They give 6 months of paternity for men as well as women so that male partners can support a working partner.
 2. Work-from-home policies are the same for everyone.
 3. Everyone flies economy class on air travel and stays at the same hotels.
 4. There is equal insurance and coverage for everyone.

- **Anchor Accountability** – They check performance management reviews to see if there are any unconscious biases. Annual salary revisions include gender pay corrections as males may have had better negotiation skills and thereby negotiated higher pay scales. They don't ask for salary slips in recruitment, but give what the position deserves.
- **Commitment to gender parity in the organisation beyond men and women (including LGBTQ)** – IKEA Group believes everyone has the right to be treated fairly and be given equal opportunities regardless of their gender. Their initiatives include recognition of the third gender, inclusive insurance that includes gender affirmation surgeries, use of pronouns, etc.

III. Society

The company believes that if “we grow, everyone grows”. When incorporating Equality as a company policy, they didn't restrict it to the company itself but also assessed how they can make an impact on society and customers. Thus, creating an impact on society is a part of the sustainability efforts of the organisation. For example, they have a program for “Building the neighbourhood”, where around all IKEA stores, they start contributing to neighbourhood areas towards education, sanitation, and skill-building (with 50-50 representation of men and women). Like, a program called Disha in partnership with UNDP in Hyderabad where an all-women batch of 80 women from the neighbourhood was trained in skills like logistics and supply chain, folk lift driving etc, and then employed them within the organisation.

“The journey is not easy. It is easier to reach the numbers but tough to maintain with turnovers etc. But commitment stays, and we continue to strive for this.

Be prepared –4 E's –energy, exhaustion, emotion, exhilaration.”

– Taruna Suhasini Lohmror

Case Study 3:

Apraava– Building Gender Diversity in the Energy sector

Apraava Energy is a Global, integrated energy solutions provider, jointly owned by the CLP Group. Due to remote locations, safety concerns and hostile mindsets in the industry that don't believe girls can do certain jobs in the energy sector – Apraava as an organisation finds it difficult to onboard female talent, especially since women also do not want to work in the energy sector in remote locations.

Some of their biggest challenges are –

- Getting the right talent to work in the sector/ organisation
- Mindset changes of male managers on how to work at sites with women
- Communicating their intent to women. Apraava is an equal-pay player but realized that they need to communicate better to share their philosophy and methodology because employee engagement surveys showed women perceive that there are inequitable pay gaps.

“Communicate, communicate, communicate – that should be the mantra.”

– Pamesh Rasanja

Currently, they have 15% women in their workforce but have taken various steps to increase these numbers –

- A collective commitment to creating an organisational culture that respects rights,
- Conscious efforts at mindset shifts,
- Accountability and reporting that sends a strong message and signals peers to follow.

Specifically, they have taken initiatives like –

- Providing 24 weeks of maternity leave even before the policy came into effect in India,
- Providing a 5-day work week, which is not the norm in the manufacturing sector,
- Giving incentives to recruit partners (like an extra 10% fee) if they bring more females,
- Making extra efforts like taking parents of young women graduates to the sites to show that it is a safe place to work for daughters.

6. Redefining Urban Spaces: Building Safe and Smart Cities

“We need inclusive urban space to build inclusive societies.” – Emani Kumar

56% of India’s population stays in cities, which is bound to increase to 70% by 2050. 80% of our GDP comes from cities. Therefore, it is vital to manage how cities are growing and make conscious efforts to make them equitable and inclusive for all. It is critical to ensure that the urban areas we live in grow in a way that is equitable, sustainable, and inclusive.

Cities started talking about gender responsiveness around the late 90s and early 2000s—while in India and South Asia, the discussion came up very late around 2005–06. Several gender equity measures have been taken up wherein transport systems have become more responsive, initiatives have been implemented to address sexual harassment and cities are designing more inclusive spaces and infrastructure. However, there is a lot more that needs to be done to enable women, because the onus of their safety continues to remain on women, especially when it comes to travel, transport and visiting public spaces. Things are changing on the ground, but the pace of change is not sufficient.

As per the panel discussion, two main aspects need to be addressed when building inclusive societies – the urban or city infrastructure, and the transport and mobility infrastructure.

“It is imperative that our urban areas grow in a way that they are equitable. We need to ask two questions – are we providing enough, and is what we are providing accessible to the vulnerable groups” – Sarika Chakravarty

6.1 Urban Infrastructure

“We need to transform cities into caring cities.” – Sarika Chakravarty

To include the needs and concerns of women in urban infrastructure, the following were some suggested actions:

- **Care work** needs to be factored in while designing infrastructure and services to address caregiving roles within public spaces. Sometimes a city ticks the boxes in terms of the availability of amenities for the population size, but the distribution is often not equitable and concentrated in certain parts of the city. In that case, services may not be accessible to vulnerable populations like the elderly, women, children, and the differently-abled.
- **Gender-responsive practices** need to be introduced in the designing of buildings, toilets, and open spaces as well as processes like waste management and sanitation.
- **Toilets** are one of the key pillars of a city's public infrastructure, and we need to address the issue of the availability of hygienic, functional, and easily accessible women's toilets. Now in many smart cities, there are apps to identify the nearest clean toilets. All toilets are open for everyone, no one can be denied usage of toilets.
- **Safety elements** need to be addressed to make cities inclusive. This involves good lighting to avoid dark spots and to increase visibility, a diverse set of eyes on the street by having more women street vendors; and reform of the police and judicial system to ensure women's lives are safer and easier in public spaces.

6.2 Transport Infrastructure and Services

“Mobility plays a key role in helping give women access to opportunities – we need to think about how we make mobility an enabler for women to access what they want – in terms of access to education, skill training and jobs.” – Mitali Nikore

The lack of mobility has been a major barrier to women's work and financial independence. Women's specific needs were not included in the design of transport infrastructure and services. Additionally, women face harassment on public transport as well as on streets and paths. It has been noted that “school girls are most photographed on metros etc without their consent”. Therefore, gender mainstreaming in transport was noted as being vital for enabling women in an Equiverse.

The panellists discussed various tools and avenues that can be used for mainstreaming gender into the city and transport infrastructure.

I. Gender lens applied to city masterplans

“Things need to change at the policy, planning and implementation levels.” – Mitali Nikore

Gender has never really featured in urban planning-related laws, rules or acts around. City development masterplans help in the long-term planning of cities and are a good place to include elements of equity and gender friendliness.

A good start in this direction has been made out of 106 smart city plans approved by the Government of India, around 40–50 are linked to gender responsiveness/equity in some way.

The example of Chennai was discussed as a case study for gender mainstreaming practices in transport –

- In a move to make Chennai safer for women and to bring gender inclusivity into all projects, a Gender and Policy Lab has been set up under the Greater Chennai Corporation in 2022 with the World Bank's assistance. The Lab has a mandate to advise on every project, especially infrastructure projects. They use standard checklists to assess design elements.
- The lab has also undertaken initiatives such as citizens' campaigns, city audits, perception surveys about the city's safety for all genders including transgenders, and a bystander campaign.
- The Gender Lab has been facilitated by Tamil Nadu's Gender Budget.
- The gender action plan has 2 key component areas – a comprehensive mobility plan that the City Unified Metropolitan Authority is putting together and the gender action plan for the master plan of the Chennai metropolitan area.

“Talking to each other at all levels, bringing the parliamentarians in touch with civil society and also looking for examples from other countries is important.” – Christian Echle

II. Gender inclusive budgets

“I have found that gender budgeting is the most effective solution for redefining urban spaces.” – Christian Echle

Gender-sensitive budgets are a vital tool for ensuring that funds prioritize inclusive elements in the development of public infrastructure.

A couple of examples were discussed at the session to illustrate how gender lens can be applied to budgets to ensure they are inclusive –

Penang Island, Malaysia: An example of using an inclusive approach to using a gender-sensitive budgeting process to build equitable urban infrastructure

In a small island in the northeast of Malaysia called Penang, a pilot project was undertaken from 2012 to 2019, to analyse gender-responsive and participatory budgeting. Annually USD 60,000 was allocated to this gender-sensitive budget of Penang Island. They undertook in-depth analysis and planning for allocating the gender budget, and involved women in the entire planning and implementation process. Women from Penang Island from all walks of life were brought into the consultation process. They especially asked women from challenged backgrounds to come into workshops and discussion groups to find out what they need, and how the city/village needs to be respaced to fit their needs. Then, all women in the village or city were asked to vote for issues that were the highest priority for them.

Based on the analysis and consultations they identified projects that should be financed by USD 60,000 every year, making it a democratic and bottoms-up approach. Following are some examples of projects that were implemented –

- **Upgradation of recreational park** – women were also involved in the planning of the project and in expressing their priorities and strategic needs. Women, for instance, did not favour having just gym accessories in the parks and needed something else.
- **Usage of pools** – An analysis of usage of budget expenses showed that the public pool financed by the budget was visited by 30% women and 70% men, implying that out of the USD 100,000 spent per year, 70,000 dollars was going to men and only 30,000 dollars to women. Therefore, the gender budget had to be used to fund other projects that could balance this out.

This 7-year pilot project significantly improved the bridge between the community and local administration. After seven years, Penang Island translated this into a gender inclusiveness policy in 2019 which has made it a permanent project. An agency was created called Penang Women's Development Centre.

This is a great example of how women can be included in urban planning without any additional costs. It is also a great approach to shaping local gender budgets. The analysis is a good practice for assessing where the budgeted amount ends up and how it could be made fairer.

Nepal: An example of gender-responsive budgets

All 248 local governments in Nepal have a female mayor or deputy mayor. These mayors are responsible for the financing department of the local governments, which has made sure that the funding is in the hands of female representatives. They must ensure 60% of the budget is spent on gender-responsive activities, otherwise, it won't be approved or passed by the local council.

III. Involve women in all planning and processes

The panellists discussed various examples that illustrate how women can be brought into various urban planning and processes to make cities inclusive.

Udaipur: Initiatives to build an inclusive smart city

- Women's Self-Help Groups have been given the responsibility of running city waste management programs in 12-13 cities in India, including Udaipur and Coimbatore. They ensure that waste segregation happens at the household level by training the women handling waste disposal at home. To ensure compliance, in Udaipur city, they are following a practice of pasting stickers outside each house, that say "responsible citizen".
- They also trained Anganwadi (women running rural childcare centres) to help in city planning and services.
- They introduced a program for caregivers called Urban 95 (reflecting the 95 cm size of a baby). The program was designed after a realisation that most caregivers are women, but only 35% of mothers took kids to nearby parks because they felt unsafe. Therefore, new policies were introduced to make it safer for them.

Kochi: an inclusive biodiversity plan –

In Kochi, ward-level action plans ensure that 50% of women should be there in action plan preparation (for biodiversity-related activities), and only then the plan will be approved.

Patna: empowered female sanitation workers –

In Patna, 50 disadvantaged, female sanitation workers operate heavy sewage and sanitation machinery every morning to clean the streets of Patna in uniforms and helmets. They have the full backing of Patna municipality and the wider ecosystem. They are rewiring the mindsets – their own and those of the community.

IV. Women in leadership positions in urban planning and transport

It is necessary to create a leadership of women at city and state levels who can take these funds and deploy them on a gender action plan. Women also need to be brought in as in charge of departments like transport and urban design.

V. Capacity building

City officials need to become aware of the need to apply a gender lens when undertaking public transport systems and city planning. This requires capacity-building initiatives to increase consciousness and awareness.

VI. Gender disaggregated data collection

There is a need to collect gender-disaggregated data to understand gender-disaggregated safety and mobility patterns better. For instance, the hours that most women travel may be different for women than men, and therefore women's availability and safety concerns need to be addressed separately. They travel more around 3 PM rather than 5-6 PM so need to increase the frequency of buses at those hours.

7. Shaping the Equiverse: Pathways to Parity - Conclusion and Key Messages

“Change has to come from ripple created by conscious people, conscious organisations, conscious societies – it all has to happen together, feeding into the other, benefitting from the other.” – Shilpa Ajwani

Equiverse is a vision of creating a Universe where equity is the norm. It envisions a new world order that is more balanced, compassionate, and progressive – one where gender parity, especially at leadership levels, would lead to a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

Addressing gender inequalities and building an “Equiverse” will require a multi-stakeholder approach that engages various entities, including governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals. Tackling deeply ingrained disparities between genders demands a concerted effort from all segments of society. A multi-stakeholder approach recognizes the interconnectedness of various factors contributing to gender inequalities and acknowledges that collective efforts are essential to create a more just and equitable world for our daughters and granddaughters. Such a world will, in turn, be more balanced, more compassionate, more progressive, and therefore more sustainable.

Following are the broad recommendations that emerged from the conference, for actions that various stakeholders can take toward building an Equiverse –

- **Family** – Inclusive and stable upbringing forms the backbone of inclusive societies. Parents need to be encouraged to challenge stereotypes, foster inclusive attitudes, and actively take actions that create an equal and level playing field for both boys and girls. Several women leaders highlighted that the foundation of their success was laid by their upbringing where they were treated equally as their brother. Similarly, the male allies attributed their “feminist” mindsets to the impact created on them by strong mothers and by the equal relationship of their parents.
- **Education ecosystem** – The conference panellists laid significant emphasis on the potential for education to transform the lives of women and girls. They all iterated that it is not just important to focus on increasing the enrolment of girls but the ecosystem needs to be empowered to provide quality education that creates more equitable life outcomes for both boys and girls. Panellists emphasized the need for a new curriculum that included conversation around gender equity right from the primary level to professional courses.
- **Policymakers** – The fact that Governments play a pivotal role in formulating and implementing policies that promote gender equality and eliminate discriminatory practices, was highlighted during the discussions. All panellists concluded that laws protect women, as laws help in framing what is right and wrong in society and also create public awareness. Laws help in recognizing deeply entrenched customs and practices as a problem, and if there is no law, then women don’t have a voice or recourse. Several conference panellists opined that India already has many effective policies and programs in place, but it is the implementation of laws and policies that has remained questionable. Therefore, priority needs to be given to better enforcing existing laws and policies and making the enforcers accountable for the implementation.
- **Corporate sector** – Businesses need to establish inclusive policies and practices within their organizations, ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment for all employees, irrespective of gender. However, the actions taken by workplaces mustn’t be simply tokens to just check the boxes but display a deeper commitment towards the goal of building diverse organizations. Several companies have already begun to implement innovative policies and programs to enable and empower women to grow and thrive in their organisations, and other organisations can use their best practices to devise their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies.

“Checking the box doesn’t change societies, checking hearts does.” – Jyoti Sagar

- **Men** – The panellists brought out the fact that many of the Invisible barriers that often come in the way of women, especially when building careers and taking on leadership positions, have to do with the agency and attitude of men. Therefore, men need to be involved at all stages and be at the centre of all solutions for enabling women’s personal and professional journeys. Conversations must be had with men, they should be exposed to all discussions where women’s challenges and solutions are being discussed.

- **Women leaders** – With gender parity at leadership levels, we can create more role models and create an ecosystem where more women can rise to their full potential and leverage their talent. Inspirational stories and insights from various panellists clearly highlighted the role that successful or pioneering women can play in taking action against patriarchal practices, mentoring younger women, and creating a path to make success easier for other women.

“Women have to get together in groups to build their agency – and it’s more difficult at the top of the pyramid.” – Ashok Alexander

- **Non-profit organisations** – civil society, including non-governmental organizations, can advocate for change, raise awareness, and provide support to those affected by gender inequalities.

“The solutions come when you see them from the shoes of the other person. If you talk to the most marginalized women – the poorest and the weakest – about what the problem is, they will give the best answer, because they live with the problem. But they will also give solutions and how to implement them if you ask them.” – Ashok Alexander

- **Data collection agencies** – As the saying goes, “what gets measured gets addressed”. Therefore, statistics and data collection agencies need to urgently collect and present data disaggregated by gender, because until we know where the lags in access to services or education etc are, then we can’t address those. Gender disaggregated data should be collated at the National, state, and local levels, across all paid and unpaid activities.
- **Media and the representation of women in media** – Media has a huge role to play in influencing mindsets and can be an effective channel of changing gender norms. However, it is important to look not just at mainstream media and cinema, but at the way we approach general news reportage and how things are covered. We need to look at how women’s roles are normalised in everyday reporting. For example, if we look at features on women, women are either the victim or the hero, but there are no normal stories of transformation. This is an area where not enough is being done, and it is tough to untangle these subtle biases regarding the way women are represented that have been normalized in societal mindsets.
- **Each individual in society** – All of us have a role to play in bringing about the necessary changes that are needed to build a more equitable world. It is up to us to help everyone in our network of influence to build their mindset, their confidence, and their openness to understanding what women go through and what it will take to help them succeed in all aspects of life

“A lot more needs to be done for our women and children, and networks (like this) can be facilitative across regions and countries.” – Rabea Brauer

Appendix I: Speaker Profiles



Andrea M. Wojnar

**UNFPA India Representative
& Country Director Bhutan**



Ashok Alexander

**Founder-Director,
The Antara Foundation**



Christian Echle

Head-Asia Pacific,
KAS



**Dr. Nitya Mohan
Khemka**

Director, PATH
Policy Analysis, Academia



Dr. Urvashi Sahni

Founder & Chief Executive,
Study Hall Educational
Foundation (SHEF)



Emani Kumar

Executive Director-South Asia,
ICLEI



Heena Handa

Managing Partner & Creative
Head,
EDC Space



Ipsita Kathuria

Founder & CEO,
TalentNomics India



Jyoti Sagar

Chairman & Founder, K&S
Partners, Intellectual Property
Attorneys
Chairman Emeritus & Found...



Maheshwer Peri

Founder & CEO, Careers 360,
Former President & CEO,
Outlook Group

Appendix I: Speakers



Mitali Nikore
Transport Specialist,
World Bank,
Founder & Chief Economist,
Nikore Associates



Neeti Banerjee
Founder & CEO,
Nbarri Inc.



Pamesh Rasanía
Head Talent Mgmt., PMS,
OD&L,
Aprava Energy



Parineeta Lakra
Country People & Culture
Manager,
IKEA India



Rabea Brauer
Country Representative,
Japan, Director of Regional
Economic Programme Asia
(SOPAS), KAS Japan



**Ramachandra Rao
Begur**
Education Specialist,
UNICEF India



Sarika Chakravarty
Team Lead,
UrbanShift Country Project,
National Institute of Urban
Affairs (NUIA)



Shilpa Ajwani
Founder & CEO, Unomantra,
Former MD, Tupperware India



Shreyasi Singh
Founder & CEO,
Harappa



Suhela Khan
Country Programme Manager-
Women's Economic
Empowerment,
UN Women



Sumitra Mishra
Executive Director,
Mobile Creches



Vani Subramanian
Film Maker

Appendix II: Conference Feedback

- High-quality interaction throughout the day.
- Amazing conference with excellent quality of speakers
- The key points discussed were really thought-provoking
- In every session, Empathetic leadership development for women emerged as a sustainable solution for creating an Equiverse.
- The concept of equiverse and the topics discussed need to be heard and noticed by all only then will it become the new normal
- Discussions were really engaging and inspiring. Change in mindset really needs to be there to build an 'Equiverse'
- It was a great experience attending such an enriching event and networking with like-minded people
- Thank you very much for organizing this interesting and useful Conference
- A really great Conference, and a very productive one!
- The variety in the conversations on the stage was wonderful to watch. From personal to policies, all were connected.
- The gap between the personal and the public/professional was well explored ...I was pleased to see.
- I appreciate Team TalentNomics India for organizing such a great event, where I got a lot of knowledge on the topics covered during the session through the all panelists, who shared their views and knowledge on the particular subject.

About TalentNomics India

TalentNomics India is a non-profit organisation. Our purpose is to Shape an Equiverse – a Universe where gender equity is the norm. We provide scalable solutions for achieving gender equity at leadership levels towards creating a gender-equitable world.

We are dedicated to taking actions that will help grow the pool of women leaders and have adopted a holistic and integrated approach to creating an ecosystem that promotes and supports women to succeed and lead organizations across all sectors of the economy.

We see ourselves as influential change agents to support and guide women on their professional journey. We also conduct original research as well as provide a platform to showcase innovative approaches, share and learn from best practices as well as facilitate thought-provoking discussions to influence and lead the journey towards gender parity at leadership levels.

We are also on the way to building a Global network of organizations to reimagine women's leadership collaboratively. We follow a 4C approach to transform the ecosystem by growing the network of Capable, Confident, Credible & Connected women leaders, and influencing the Capacity, Convergence, Culture and Collaboration within organisations.

Our Focus

- To Start – Women leaders we want to grow for Succession Pipeline
- To Fuel – Mentors, leaders who will sustain a Supportive Network
- To Nurture – the Ecosystem we will influence for Societal Change

Conference Team:

Ipsita Kathuria	Ina Wadhwa	Disha Tripathy	Tanika Marwah
Megha Chhabra	Shravani Prakash	Tazeen Parvez	

Get in touch:

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About KAS Japan

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany. Its activities and projects support a proactive approach towards international cooperation and understanding.

The foundation's office in Japan hosts the Regional Economic Program Asia (SOPAS). SOPAS is a regional forum that contributes to the debate and reform of economic and governance models in Asia. The key issues it advocates for are advancing female leadership, free trade and multilateralism, and the future of work. It brings together a network of policymakers, economists, political analysts and thought leaders across Asia-Pacific to discuss emerging issues, propose policy alternatives and share best practices.

Conference Team

Rabea Brauer

Cristita Perez

Sakuya Iwakawa

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*Map is not drawn to scale and is for visual representation only



Our Vision

- 100,000 Capable, Confident, Connected & Credible women leaders trained
- Influential change agents in organizations worldwide that support and guide women in their leadership journey
- Global, virtual platform for strengthening the 4Cs for individuals and organizations worldwide
- Global network of organizations that collaborate to champion women's leadership and pay equity
- A world transformed by an expanded pool of women's leadership talent

Our Mission

The mission of TalentNomics is to reimagine leadership for modern workplaces in the global economy by developing and leveraging the talents of women leaders to their fullest potential and eliminating the gender gap in leadership and pay. We believe that expanding the number of women in leadership will transform the workplace and the world.