



Restoring the Equiverse: From Vision to Action



CONFERENCE REPORT

27th March, 2025

Preface

In our ongoing quest to create an **Equiverse**—a universe where gender equity is the norm—we continually seek new pathways to accelerate progress. Today's data paints a sobering picture: women across South Asia still face stark disparities in access to **work, wealth, well-being, and welfare**. Female labour-force participation remains low—from India's 42% to even lower rates in neighbouring countries—underscoring how deeply culture, social norms, and patriarchal mind-sets shape laws, policies, and infrastructure.

On **27 March 2025**, TalentNomics India, in partnership with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Economic Programme Asia (SOPAS), Japan, convened our **9th Global Annual Leadership Conference, "Restoring the Equiverse: From Vision to Action,"** in New Delhi. We brought together 20 global leaders—from ambassadors and UN representatives to corporate directors, activists, and grassroots change-makers—to probe the interlocking barriers to equity and co-design innovative solutions. Over 135 in-person participants and a virtual audience joined these critical conversations, demonstrating that collaboration is our greatest catalyst for change.

Drawing on rich expert insights, panel discussions and breakout sessions, this report captures our collective commitment to actionable policy recommendations, organizational best practices, and community-driven strategies. It reflects not only what we discussed but—crucially—what we plan to do next: from reimagining workplaces and closing the wealth gap to transforming social narratives and strengthening legal frameworks.

My heartfelt thanks go to Shravani Prakash, whose clear and compelling writing has shaped this report. I also express deep gratitude to KAS-SOPAS Japan, our conference partner, and to our generous sponsors—our true "Equiverse Enablers." Finally, I extend special appreciation to our speakers, panellists, and participants for their candour, passion, and unwavering dedication to forging a more inclusive world.

Together, let us press forward—turning today's insights into tomorrow's realities, and moving ever faster toward an Equiverse that empowers every individual to fulfill their potential, irrespective of gender.

Warm regards,



Ipsita Kathuria

Founder & CEO
TalentNomics India

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the key take-aways and recommendations from the Conference “**Restoring the Equiverse: From Vision to Action**”, held on 27 March 2025 in New Delhi. This was the 9th Annual Leadership Conference organized by TalentNomics India, in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung’s Regional Economic Programme Asia (SOPAS). It brought together over 135 participants and more than 20 global leaders, to deliberate on measures needed to accelerate progress toward gender equity by turning vision into measurable action.

Based on the concept of the “*Equiverse*”—a universe where gender equity is the norm—the conference focused on closing the gender gap in *Work, Wealth, Well-being, and Welfare*. It emphasized that ideas must evolve into tangible interventions across systems and societies.

Four broad themes were explored during the conference:

- **Reimagining Workplaces** - The conference highlighted the need to overhaul workplace cultures and systems that hinder women’s advancement. DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) efforts, though under rollback globally, were defended as business imperatives—not just ethical mandates. Best practices shared included inclusive policies, flexible work environments, mentorship programs, and culture-driven approaches beyond compliance. Examples of companies that have pioneered efforts and initiatives of to build enabling, inclusive environments were highlighted.
- **Bridging the Gender Wealth Gap** - Persistent pay gaps, limited asset ownership, and poor access to capital and inheritance continue to disadvantage women. Panelists advocated for early financial education, gender-sensitive financial products, and policy support for women entrepreneurs. Innovative models such as Bangladesh’s “Nibedita” insurance product and SEWA’s grassroots efforts demonstrated how tailored solutions can bridge gaps.
- **Transforming Gender Norms** - The role of men as allies, media as narrative shapers, and education systems as foundational influencers was explored in detail. The conference called for a dismantling of traditional stereotypes that confine both men and women. Suggestions included respectful storytelling in media, encouraging male caregiving, and teaching inclusive values to the next generation.
- **Policy and Systemic Interventions** – It is evident that structural policy-level reforms are essential for sustained gender parity. India has taken significant policy measures to enable women in the workforce that have shown positive results, such as mandated Board quotas and prevention of sexual harassment. Further measures proposed at the conference included gender audits in corporate reporting, localized nutrition schemes for girls, and policies supporting informal women workers. Examples from Norway and Thailand illustrated how strong legal frameworks and political will can yield economic and social benefits.

The conference underscored that restoring the Equiverse is both a moral imperative and an economic necessity. While progress is evident, the journey is far from over. Achieving gender equity demands collective commitment across all levels—homes, boardrooms, and parliaments; bold, purpose-driven leadership; and everyday actions to challenge bias and reshape norms.

Introduction

"My dream is to see a world where no girl is told she cannot dream of what she wants to be. No boy is told not to cry, no woman is harassed on the street and no man is heckled because he is a primary caregiver. No woman is financially dependent on anyone for her well-being. And no man goes hungry because he cannot cook. Because we know that shedding these kinds of stereotypes and creating policies, infrastructure that create equal opportunities for all leads to a more prosperous, happier, harmonious and sustainable world."

– Ipsita Kathuria, Founder &CEO, TalentNomics India

Gender equity remains a persistent and significant global challenge worldwide, but South Asia is one of the regions where disparities between men and women are most pronounced. According to the *World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024*, at our current pace, South Asia will need nearly 170 years to close gaps in economic participation, political empowerment, and educational attainment. Women's labour force participation in the region stands at just 32% versus the 47% global average. India, the largest economy in the region, has seen its female participation edge up to 31% in 2024¹, although women remain still vastly underrepresented in leadership roles across sectors.

With the vision of finding solutions to these persistent gender imbalances, TalentNomics India first introduced the concept of "Equiviverse"—a universe where gender equity is the norm—at its 2021 Annual Leadership Conference. Over the last four years, the consequent annual leadership conferences have probed what it takes to transform that vision into reality by focusing on reducing the gender gap in the "4Ws": Work, Wealth, Well-being, and Welfare for women.

This year, *TalentNomics India's 9th Global Annual Leadership Conference, held on 27 March 2025 in New Delhi*, in partnership with *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's Regional Economic Programme Asia (SOPAS)*, took the mandate a step further. Under the theme "*Restoring the Equiverse: From Vision to Action*," the conference discussions zeroed in on the policies and practices that can accelerate progress, emphasising the fact that ideas must lead to measurable change.

More than 135 participants—over 40% of which were men—joined the discussions. 22 Global Leaders led the conversation as speakers and panellists. They included UN officials, corporate leaders, change makers and grassroots champions. Through collaborative dialogue, the deliberations created a path for achieving the vision of a balanced, progressive, and sustainable world-where equity is not just an ideal but a reality.

The conference explored four broad areas:

1. **Workplace transformations** - needed to make employment practices truly equitable in the current context
2. **Bridging the gender wealth gap** - initiatives that could reduce the pay gap, increase women's access to investments, and reduce the gender wealth gap
3. **Shifting social narratives** - ways to engage men, media, policymakers, academicians as advocates for gender equity
4. **Policy interventions and legal frameworks** - needed to foster change at a faster rate

¹as per World Bank,

<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/india#:~:text=In%20India%2C%20the%20labor%20force,has%20remained%20roughly%20the%20same.>

Participants engaged in discussions to share their experiences and insights to fill information gaps, proposed policy interventions, and shared best practices shaping an inclusive future. They shared inspiring stories of breaking stereotypes and forging new pathways to equity.

The conference was divided into ten insightful sessions and a roundtable discussion between participants.

Sessions

Introduction and Opening Remarks	Ipsita Kathuria and Paul Linnarz introduced the conference with a background to the concept of Equiverse and the motivation driving their collective commitment to shaping a more equitable future.
Keynote Address: The Urgency of Restoring the Equiverse: Bridging Gaps, Empowering Futures	Amb. May-Elin Stener shared inspirational lessons from Norway's journey to being the most gender equitable country and the urgent need to bridge global gender gaps.
SESSION 1 - Reimagining Workplaces— Building Gender-Responsive Employment Practices	Cristita Perez, Ritvik Lukose, Kanchan Chehal and Sakshi Bajaj explored the challenges of working women and best practices for transforming workplaces to be inclusive and supportive for all employees to thrive; especially in the light of the current defocusing on DEI.
Fireside Chat - Walking the Talk: Fostering an Equiverse	Kishore Ajwani shared anecdotes and observations of gender biases and patriarchal mindsets, which he has observed in his personal life and his professional life in the media and how he deals with it.
SESSION 2 - Financial Empowerment— Bridging the Gender Wealth Gap	Srikant Sastri, Farzanah Chowdhury, Namrata Kohli and Neeti Katoch discussed the numerous factors that create the wealth gap (pay gap, lack of inheritance, inadequate access to business financing, low investment appetite in women, etc) and innovative, gender-sensitive solutions that are needed to bridge the gap.
SPECIAL SESSION – SEWA Sisters' Journey in Bridging the Wealth Gap	Mansi Shah engaged with two SEWA sisters who shared their stories to show how SEWA's model has enabled their wealth creation and lifted them out of extreme poverty.
KEYNOTE ADDRESS: The Path Forward: Visionary Leadership for Restoring the Equiverse	Neelam Dhawan shared anecdotes, experiences and insights of navigating her leadership journey at Indian workplaces as a female professional in the IT sector.
SESSION 3: Allies to Advocates— Transforming the Narrative Around Gender Roles	Francois Bourgoin, Anisha Motwani, Manasi Narasimhan and Ruhail Amin discussed various facets of gender biases and patriarchal norms that exist in society, and how stakeholders like men (as allies) and the media (as a narrative creator) can shift the social narrative and enable a more equitable society.
VALEDICTORY SESSION: A Collective Commitment to Equity	Kanta Singh shared her experiences from her journey of enabling women and working towards bringing large scale change in the lives of other women.

Background and Context: Persistence of Gender Inequality and Patriarchal Norms

“Unfortunately, the change is happening at a too slow pace. If we don't speed up the change, full gender equality remains a distant goal. At the current pace of change, it will be our grandchildren-or even great-grandchildren who will raise the victory flag for gender equality.”

–Ambassador May-Elin Stener

Three decades on from the 1995 Beijing Declaration, the world has undeniably advanced in women's rights. Across the globe, more women sit in parliaments, boardrooms, pursue higher education, and access vital healthcare services than ever before. Yet this progress—while celebrated—unfolds at a glacial pace. As estimated by the World Economic Forum in 2024, at the current rate it could take 134 years to close the global gender gap.

This prolonged timeline has dire consequences. Below are some of the key barriers that the panellists identified, which represent the various facets of gender inequities and require urgent attention:

Patriarchal Norms and Cultural Conditioning Remain Deeply Entrenched

“Earlier women were supposed to be virtuous and silent. Now they're supposed to be resilient and multitasking.”

– Kishore Ajwani, Managing Editor, News18 India

Despite decades of progress, patriarchal norms continue to shape the lives of women. Millions of women and girls around the world continue to lack the freedom of choosing if, when, and whom to marry. Many are denied the chance of educating themselves and realising their ambitions. Most women have little or no control over household finances, affecting their ability to support their children's nutrition, health, and education.

These social expectations play out in daily life. For instance, in many communities, women are expected to change not just their surname but even their first name after marriage, symbolizing a complete shift in identity. In countless households across India, women eat last and consume the leftovers. Such practices help explain why 75% of non-pregnant, non-lactating Indian women suffer from anaemia—a stark indicator of how invisible care work can diminish health. Moreover, these patterns are not only imposed by society but are internalized by women themselves, making them harder to dismantle.

“In many languages, the vocabulary is completely male-oriented and there are no feminine equivalents.”

–Francois Bourgoin, Founder, Managing & Creative Director, Graffiti wll

Women Bear a Disproportionate Care Burden

Cultural conditioning still defines women primarily as caregivers and homemakers, and their unpaid domestic labour remains invisible in economic discourse. Gender roles are often normalized rather than questioned. Across societies, women are disproportionately tasked with caregiving - childcare, elder care, household management, and the relentless “mental load” of planning and coordination of everyday tasks.

These expectations persist even when women are employed full-time, resulting in a double burden that significantly impacts their health, career progression, and personal well-being. Societal narratives still cast men

as providers and women as nurturers; reinforcing the idea that care giving is a woman's "natural" role. This mental conditioning is so deeply internalized that many women themselves accept the expectation to juggle home and work responsibilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these expectations when homes became virtual "offices and schools" for the whole family but it was mostly the women who had to step in to juggle professional duties alongside full-time domestic chores.

"Whether it is business or in life or in any aspect of life, if you have to achieve disruptive change and growth, you need to challenge the norms"

– Anisha Motwani, Founder, STORM the NORM Ventures

The Structural and Systemic Barriers Prevent Women's Economic Empowerment

The patriarchal barriers have prevented much progress towards changing entrenched mindset about women's capabilities. As women are assumed to be the default caregivers, their unpaid labour is rarely recognized as an economic contribution despite being essential to the functioning of households and the productivity of working family members. Their unpaid domestic care work is chronically undervalued. The phrase "*women's work is no work*" still echoes in families, boardrooms, and policy circles alike.

"Consider India's midday meal program: most cooks are women who earn a mere ₹1,000 per month, officially classified as "honorary workers" to bypass minimum wage laws. Their vital contributions to feeding millions of schoolchildren each day, remain underpaid and unprotected."

–Kishore Ajwani, Managing Editor, News18 India

Workplace cultures reinforce these stereotypes. Performance appraisals seldom account for career breaks, so women who pause for care giving face the so-called "M-curve" in their careers—stalled progression that men, with uninterrupted trajectories, rarely experience. Until appraisal systems, leave policies, and mentorship models evolve to accommodate diverse life journeys, true economic empowerment for women will remain elusive.

However, beyond these injustices lies a vast reservoir of untapped talent and innovation, whose contribution could add significantly to global growth and prosperity as well as address the world's most urgent challenges. Until the debilitating mindsets change, true gender equality, and the ensuing gains, will remain out of reach.

The following sections list some key actionable measures, brought out during the conference discussions that must be urgently implemented to enable women and address the various forms of inequities faced by women.

Reimagining Workplaces: Building Gender-Responsive Employment Practices

The workplace is a pivotal space for driving gender equity, yet traditional structures and practices often fall short in addressing the needs of women and marginalized groups. There is, therefore, a need to reimagine and redesign work environments to be more inclusive, equitable, and supportive, enabling all employees, regardless of gender, to thrive and succeed.

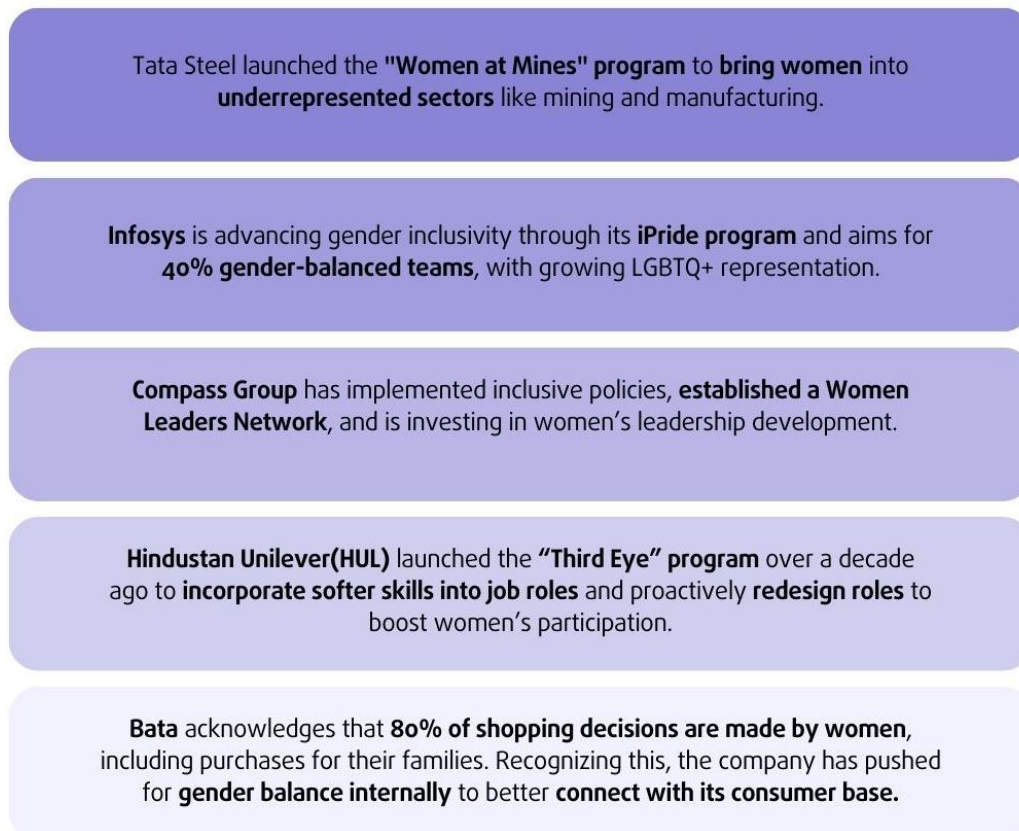
"Workplace diversity and equity have become increasingly critical in business today. Their impact on a company's bottom line can be truly significant."

- Cristita Perez, Senior Project Manager, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

However, in recent months there has been a troubling pushback against Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives globally, with mandates rolled back, hiring targets shelved, and even labels repackaged. Some companies in India as well have started to scale back their DEI efforts, citing economic pressures, shifting priorities, or a renewed focus on core business operations. Organizations are openly stepping away from earlier DEI commitments. For instance, Google and PepsiCo have retracted hiring mandates, and IBM has rebranded DEI as 'Diverse Opportunity and Inclusion' - signalling a shift away from the term itself.

Despite this bleak reality, some organizations continue to lead with purpose (Figure 1), showing that DEI is not just a "nice to have" or an ethical responsibility but a strategic imperative and a business essential. They demonstrate an understanding of the fact that companies cannot afford to disengage from inclusion efforts, because the organizations that invest in inclusive cultures have shown to be the ones most likely to thrive, innovate, and lead.

Figure 1: Several companies are setting benchmarks in embedding inclusion into their business



Research and empirical studies have shown that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are no longer optional but critical drivers of business success²:

- Organizations with inclusive practices see 1.4x higher employee retention and up to 2.9x greater productivity (*Great Place to Work (GPTW)*).
- 70% of candidates prefer to join companies that reflect their values and demonstrate inclusive practices (*LinkedIn*).
- Inclusive organizations are seen as more future-ready by investors, clients, and job seekers.
- Diverse teams offer a broader range of perspectives, leading to greater innovation, creativity, and more effective decision-making.
- Inclusive workplaces are better at retaining top talent, as employees are more likely to stay in organizations where they feel valued and respected.
- Companies that actively invest in DEI tend to enjoy a stronger reputation, resulting in increased customer loyalty, enhanced brand image, and often higher sales.

“When organizations recognize the value of diversity and inclusion, they adapt to trends that prioritize accountability, global inclusion and employee wellbeing, all of which contribute to long-term organizational success.”

– **Cristita Perez, Senior Project Manager, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**

Figure 2: Country-level impact of increased female participation in the workforce



While India is modernizing rapidly, inclusion remains deeply uneven, rooted in long-standing social and economic inequities. The data underscores this gap.

² As quoted by the conference panellists

Figure 3: Statistics show that India's workforce is not yet truly inclusive



Source: World Bank³, Deloitte⁴, Business Standard⁵

These statistics are a reflection of several challenges that women face in the workplace, some of which include:

- **Career Leakage Due to Life Events** - Women often drop out of the workforce due to maternity, marriage, relocation (especially following a spouse), or familial responsibilities. These career breaks result in "leakage" from the corporate talent pipeline.
- **Conforming to Male Norms** - Workplaces often expect women to behave like men to succeed rather than valuing their unique perspectives.
- **Lack of Visibility and Representation** - Women's contributions, roles, and needs are often invisible or minimized in workplace culture. There is insufficient representation of women-centric realities (like childcare responsibilities) in professional settings.
- **Challenges in Mentoring and Sponsorship** - Women often struggle to find mentors and sponsors organically within organizations, and they usually need to seek them out on their own actively.

³<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/india#:~:text=In%20India%2C%20the%20labor%20force,has%20remained%20roughly%20the%20same.>

⁴<https://www2.deloitte.com/in/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/Women-in-boardroom-A-global-perspective.html#:~:text=The%20eighth%20edition%20of%20the,from%2013.8%20percent%20in%202018.>

⁵https://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/persons-with-disabilities-form-less-than-0-5-of-staff-in-india-s-top-firms-119111200206_1.html

- **Women's Perception of Career Priority** - Unlike men who often readily state their career as a top priority, women, especially working women, often prioritize family responsibilities. This can inadvertently signal a lower commitment to career advancement, even if untrue.
- **Unconscious Bias in Self-Evaluation** - Men tend to overstate their contributions even with moderate results, while women often downplay their achievements even with similar performance. This unconscious bias can lead to skewed salary and promotion decisions.
- **"Corridor Conversations"** - There is an often-heard scenario where, despite outward claims of equality, subtle biases and concerns about women's work-life balance (e.g., leaving early, travel limitations) are discussed privately, hindering their opportunities.
- **Lack of a Clear Growth Path** - Women often leave organizations not due to lack of ambition or resources, but because they don't see a clear path for advancement and growth within the company.
- **Bias in Performance Evaluation** - Men are often evaluated based on quantifiable results (numbers), while women's contributions might be disproportionately focused on "soft skills". Aggressive behaviour in men is often seen as assertive and positive, while similar behaviour in women can be perceived negatively, as being "difficult to manage". Promotion decisions are often influenced by informal networks and unspoken rules that disadvantage women.
- **Hesitation to Apply for Promotions:** Women often feel they need to be 100% qualified before applying for a promotion or raising their hand for an opportunity, unlike their male counterparts who might apply even at a 60% readiness level. They tend to focus on what they are missing rather than what they have to offer.

"Hiring women is only the start. You will have to ensure as an organization how they grow, thrive and lead teams."

-Sakshi Bajaj, Head, Diversity & Inclusion, Talent Management, and Employee Engagement

Workplaces must champion true equity by focusing on talent, enabling inclusive environments, challenging unconscious bias - and eventually, moving past gender labels altogether. The following are some enabling actions and policies that organisations can take to enable women at work:

- **Create Supportive Workplace Policies and Infrastructure** - Workplaces must provide dedicated breastfeeding rooms, on-site day care, sanitary-product dispensers, and access to reproductive/sexual health services.
- **Normalize Shared Care** - Companies must support shared care giving responsibilities by enabling and normalizing fathers taking time off for parenting, like picking up children from day care or staying at home with sick children. They should encourage senior leaders to model inclusive behaviour (e.g., displaying their child's study schedule at work, doing everyday tasks themselves instead of expecting women to do them).
- **Beware of Unconscious Bias (Even in Positive Stereotypes)** - True equality would mean not assuming certain roles are better assigned to specific gender - consciously or subconsciously. Assuming a CHRO must be a woman, even if women currently dominate the field, is an example of unconscious bias. For roles across the C-suite — whether CEO or Head of HR, the criteria for selection should be on performance, contribution, and capability, not gender.
- **Move Beyond Tokenism** - While it's helpful to celebrate "firsts" (e.g., first female CTO) in some contexts, especially for role modelling, workplaces must aim for a time where gender is no longer a qualifier. Also, hiring should be of the right talent for the role-free of all biases with the focus being on competence rather than just hiring more women just for achieving a specific gender percentage.

- **Address Safety and Security Concerns** - Companies could consider providing corporate leases or a bank of apartments for women relocating from other cities to address safety and security concerns, which are significant barriers.
- **Build "Mental Merit"** - Women perceive their merit at a lower level than men perceive their merit and therefore need opportunities and encouragement to build similar confidence as men usually possess about their own capabilities. Companies should publish transparent promotion/salary criteria and encourage and mentor women to apply even if they meet 60–80% of requirements, and actively sponsor their growth.
- **Flexibility and Empathy:** Recognizing the need for sabbaticals and other breaks, companies should offer flexible and hybrid work arrangements to support work-life balance for men and women. Tailored leave policies that respect personal needs without penalizing careers will help in retention, especially of women.
- **Make Policies Visible and Known:** It is not enough to have non-discriminatory and equitable policies but also to have them clearly communicated and understood by everyone in the organization.
- **Make Step-by-Step Progress to Build an Inclusive Culture:** The goal of an organisation should be to build a workplace where contributions are valued for their merit, not categorized by gender. One useful framework is the using a Maturity Model like Bradley Curve (originally used in safety management at DuPont), which illustrates how organizations move from Laissez-faire (no action), to compliance and control, to individual commitment to inclusion, and finally, to a culture of mutual accountability and team-driven inclusion. When culture evolves to this level, inclusion becomes a shared belief system, not just a mandate.

"Women's value lies in their difference. Let them lead as women - not as copies of men."

– Neelam Dhawan, Board Member, Mentor & Advisor, Former MD-HP

Figure 4: Some Best Practices for Building Enabling Workplaces for Women

1. Inclusive Leadership Culture - Leaders “walk the talk” to shape a culture where inclusion is deeply embedded.

2. Structured Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs - Provide young and mid-career women with guidance, support, and a sounding board for workplace challenges, helping them build confidence and visibility.

3. Belonging: From DEI to DEIB - Creating a sense of community and emotional connection fosters loyalty and motivation, going beyond policy to shape genuine engagement.

4. Flexible Work Environments - Remote work, flexible hours, and outcome-based performance metrics that allow employees to balance personal responsibilities without being penalized

5. Parental Leave and Norm-Shifting HR Policies - Leave policies that support both mothers and fathers signal a shift in expectations around caregiving.

6. Career Planning and Development Frameworks - Empower women to define their career goals, provide frameworks to track and measure progress, create structured pathways for advancement,

7. Board Representation and Leadership Development - Aim for 33% to 50% representation on boards

8. Balanced Workforce Strategy (BWS) - Ensures equal opportunity for all roles, provided the competence and skills are comparable.

9. Pay Equity and Transparent Processes - Pay parity embedded in organizational processes, moving beyond manager discretion to transparent decision-making.

10. Culture Over Compliance - Inclusion becomes a part of the culture, not just a checklist.

“Compliance is only going to be the lowest common denominator, and it is culture that is really the key.”

– Ritvik Lukose, Lawyer, Entrepreneur and Co-Founder, Vahura and Counselect

Financial Empowerment: Bridging the Gender Wealth Gap

Economic independence is a cornerstone of gender equity, yet a persistent wealth gap continues to disadvantage women worldwide. In many developed economies, women enjoy relatively equitable access to financial services, credit, and property rights - foundations that support asset building over a lifetime. By contrast, in developing countries like India, systemic obstacles - from limited financial literacy and bank account ownership to legal and cultural barriers - severely hinder women's participation in the labour force and their ability to accumulate wealth.

"Over a lifetime, women create a lot less wealth than men in terms of assets, property, etc. Now this is an important distinction because the wealth gap really hurts, especially when there's a sudden economic shock that happens or a health impact that happens in the family. That's when wealth gets a lot more depleted, and the woman is then left stranded."

- Srikant Sastri, Chairman, GDPDC

The following are the causes and factors behind the large wealth gaps between men and women that were discussed during the conference, along with measures that can help bridge these gaps:

The Gender Pay Gap - A persistent gender pay gap undermines women's ability to save, invest, and build retirement security, and hinders their economic empowerment.

The pay gap is attributed to societal mindset that often undermines women's capabilities, leading to unequal pay for similar work. Career breaks cause disparity. While initial hiring in the corporate sector might offer equal opportunities, the gender pay gap significantly widens after women take career breaks. Organisations often hesitate in providing equal pay and opportunities for advancement due to concerns about women's career continuity after breaks (e.g., for family reasons). Some organizations have policies that allow women to return after career breaks, often starting at a lower salary with the potential for an increase based on performance after a few months. However, the results of such policies are not always very successful.

"The main issue that hinders women's empowerment is a flawed mindset — reinforced by messaging and communication that portray women as inherently vulnerable and constantly seeking protection."

- Farzanah Chowdhury, MD & CEO, Green Delta Insurance Co. Ltd.

Lack of Asset Ownership by Women - *"Only 13% of the world's land is in the name of women, while 87% is with men⁶."* Many women do not even have a house in their names. Encouraging women to own assets, not just savings (wealth), is vital because assets provide a more secure and independent form of strength that cannot be easily taken away through emotional manipulation. The real power for women lies in owning money and, more importantly, assets like property.

Focusing on women having property in their own names is a crucial step towards their empowerment. Other struggles for equality will have limited impact without this fundamental economic security.

"Instead of dowry, give your daughters, your friends, your sisters' houses or property, as this would make a significant difference in their lives."

- Kanta Singh, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women India

⁶ As quoted by a panelist, refer [Oxfam report](#)

Lack of Awareness About Inheritance Rights - Inheritance provides an initial endowment of wealth that significantly influences future life decisions. The lack of access to inherited wealth perpetuates economic disparities over time.

Yet many women remain unaware of their legal entitlement. In India, law has granted equal inheritance rights to ancestral and inherited property since 2005, but low legal literacy and entrenched social norms prevent most women from claiming them. This gap not only denies women a critical asset base today but perpetuates economic inequality for future generations.

Lack of Specific Financial Products for Women - Despite growing female participation in the economy, most banks and insurers remain anchored in male focused financial products-overlooking women's unique life cycles, especially career breaks and intermittent income.

It is important to understand the specific needs and challenges women face, and then design products that go beyond traditional financial products to offer holistic solutions that empower them financially, socially, and legally. A participatory approach in product development and strategic partnerships are key.

Lack of Targeted Marketing to Women - Marketing of products should also avoid reinforcing the stereotypical societal mindset and harmful messaging that portrays women as inherently vulnerable and only seeking security. Women are not a monolith: they include homemakers without formal salaries, the roughly 30% in India's formal workforce, and a rising cohort of entrepreneurs. Financial product positioning must avoid stereotyping products for women based on female vulnerability and need for security; instead, it should celebrate resilience, autonomy, and varied aspirations.

The development of financial products specifically for women has led to improvements in Bangladesh. Government Initiatives for Women's Financial Empowerment in Bangladesh to promote women's financial inclusion include Central bank mandating 20% green financing to women and Security Exchange Commission introducing "orange bonds" and green bonds. Thoughtful product design and policy backing can bridge critical gaps and drive lasting financial inclusion.

Box 1: Green Delta Insurance's "Nibedita" Insurance Product

Recognized by the UN in 2016, Nibedita went beyond just insurance by empowering women through independent decision-making, access to finance, healthcare, information, and security. The innovative product development was not a top-down approach but involved working closely with women to understand their needs. They tailored their products to cater to women from all socioeconomic levels, from micro-segment to CEOs. The goal was to create a comprehensive financial and social service, Holistic "One-Stop" platform for women.

To make financial products more appealing and beneficial for women, the insurance product incorporated value-added services such as:

- **Access to Loans:** Partnerships with banks to provide attractive lending rates to insurance policyholders.
- **Access to Funds and Deposits:** Making it easier for women to access funds and deposit schemes.
- **Access to Information:** Providing information on legal rights (like inheritance) and financial management for larger sums.
- **Access to Healthcare:** Partnerships with hospitals and healthcare providers.
- **Access to Security:** Integrating a panic button feature in their app with links to law enforcement and lawyers.
- **Access to legal Support:** A crucial offering is access to a panel of lawyers for policyholders facing various difficulties (business, personal, etc.).

These seemingly simple additions, when combined, had a significant impact on women's empowerment. Starting with a small base, the organization now serves over 100,000 women across Bangladesh. They have forged partnerships with several banks, other financial institutions and corporates to reach more women. They have developed tailored financial products for garment workers.

Low Use of Investments as a Tool for Wealth Creation - Investing allows money to work for women, create assets, and secure a comfortable standard of living. While Indian women are often diligent savers, saving erodes real value over time due to inflation. True wealth arises from investing - yet many women (and even men) conflate saving with investing, missing opportunities to build assets and secure their futures.

A multi-pronged strategy can enhance women's financial empowerment, involving:

- **Early Financial Education:** Schools could introduce a game-based curriculum on wealth creation in schools (up to the 12th standard) using token/digital money to provide a practical understanding.
- **Influencer Campaigns:** Leverage social media personalities to demystify investing and showcase relatable role models.
- **Policy Support:** Encourage regulators to mandate clear disclosures, low-cost advisory services, and incentives for women focused investment vehicles.
- **Product Innovation:** Urge banks, asset managers, and fintechs to design and market investment products (e.g. micro-SIPs, goal-based portfolios) tailored to women's risk profiles and life stages.
- **Narrative Shifts:** Launch public education campaigns that replace wedding focused financial planning with long-term wealth creation
- **Accessible Advice:** Promote pro bono or subsidized financial advisor programs so women can receive expert guidance without upfront costs.

"We are all preparing for the big fat Indian wedding day. We are preparing for a wedding. We are not preparing for their married life! We are not empowering our women."

– **Namrata Kohli, Columnist, Journalist and Author**

Lack of Security for Gig Workers - A significant share of India's female workforce is engaged in part-time, freelance, or gig roles-yet these workers are classified as "business associates," leaving them without employee benefits, accident coverage, employment protection or retirement savings. Gig workers are often below the poverty line.

To address this vulnerability, governments and industry bodies should consider:

- **Mandatory Social Security Contributions:** Extend provident fund-style deductions or pension scheme enrolments to gig workers, ensuring a retirement corpus and survivor benefits.
- **Accident & Health Coverage:** Require platforms to provide basic health insurance or personal accident riders for all active gig workers.
- **Portable Benefits Platform:** Develop a centralized system where workers accumulate contributions—even when switching between multiple platforms or employers.
- **Sector-Specific Guidelines:** Tailor schemes to different gig categories (e.g., delivery, ride hailing and freelance) with benefit levels matched to earning patterns.

Challenges in Accessing Finance for Women Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is one of the strongest catalysts for building wealth and financial prosperity. However, women continue to face several barriers to building and scaling businesses, especially in the form of

inadequate access to finance. The following were some facets of the entrepreneurship gender gap that were discussed during the conference:

Scarce Venture Capital & Procurement: Less than 2% of venture capital funding goes to women-owned businesses. Less than 1% of large companies procure from women-owned businesses. Even educated founders are sometimes denied credit, for reasons like a lack a male co-founder.

Banking Bias & Collateral Hurdles: Banks sometimes exhibit a biased mindset that questions the ability of women entrepreneurs to succeed and grow their businesses, hindering their access to crucial financial resources. For example, in Bangladesh, despite a central bank policy allowing women to take out loans upto 2.5 million Taka without collateral, banks are often hesitant due to doubts about the entrepreneur's growth potential.

Drop-off at Larger Scales: In microfinance, a significant majority (97%) of loans are disbursed to women, indicating that women have better access to credit at the micro-level. However, as loan sizes and business scales increase (SMEs, MSMEs, and larger loans), the representation of women entrepreneurs significantly decreases.

Therefore, there is a need to move beyond unsystematic discussions about investing in gender-responsive products and initiatives, towards systematization and standards. New and innovative products are needed to bridge the investment and finance gap for women entrepreneurs. For instance:

- **Gender Bonds** are financial instruments that mobilize funding specifically for projects and initiatives that support women's empowerment. Organizations (likely the ADB - Asian Development Bank, based on context) invested in a gender bond in Central Asia and are planning another in India. These bonds help development finance institutions like ADB to act as anchor or 1st investors, which in turn demonstrates the commercial viability and feasibility of the investment and thereby encouraging other investors to participate.

"Past conversations have been very unsystematic and unclear about what it means to invest in gender-responsive products and initiatives. Therefore, we need to bridge the gap between the conversations that happen in rooms like this and what is happening on the ground. So I think the industry is moving to setting standards that are globally recognized but also needs to look at more outcome-based approaches."

– Neeti Katoch, Gender Specialist, Private Sector Operations, ADB

- **Government Support in Smaller Towns** can create opportunities for women's wealth creation, where private sector funding might be lacking. For instance, an example was cited where a woman in Kushinagar (a Tier 3/4 city and Buddhist pilgrimage site in Uttar Pradesh) initially owned a grocery store. But with the help of government funding, she set up a souvenir shop and an AR/VR booth for tourists.

- **Enable Self Help Groups (SHGs), Similar to the SEWA model**

"Poor informal sector workers form 93% of our country's workforce, of which 50% are women. These women are the poorest of the poor. They grapple with outdated skills, lack modern tools and technology, are constantly challenged by evolving market dynamics, and are particularly vulnerable to economic downturn."

–Mansi Shah, Senior Coordinator, SEWA

Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is the single largest Central Trade union in India, with a membership of over 3.2 million poor, self-employed women workers from the informal economy across 18 states in India. SEWA promotes the rights of low-income, independently employed female workers. It organises around the goal of full employment in which a woman secures work, income, food, and social security like health care, child care, insurance, pension and shelter.

Box 2: SEWA as an Enabler for Entrepreneurship and Wealth Creation in the Informal Sector: Two Stories

Bhavna Ben from Arali district in Gujarat

Bhavna Ben's story is a powerful testament to how SEWA's grassroots organizing and the self-help group (SHG) model can empower marginalized women in rural India, enabling them to overcome poverty, reclaim their assets, gain financial independence, build agency, and even break through personal and societal limitations.

Bhavna Ben's journey began in a tribal family so impoverished they had to mortgage their only land just to survive. Inspired by SEWA's grassroots leaders, she formed a self-help group of 25 women, each contributing ₹50 a month. This collective savings unlocked a loan—otherwise impossible through formal banks—that Bhavna used to de-mortgage her land. SEWA's training in organic farming then enabled her to cultivate corn and cotton, establishing a steady livelihood. By repaying her group loan on time, she built a strong CIBIL score, which opened the doors to larger loans and allowed her to send her son to school.

From her humble start, Bhavna's leadership has flourished: she now guides more than 85,000 women across 300 self-help groups in her district. Beyond financial gains, SEWA strengthened her agency—today she owns her land outright, makes independent cultivation decisions, and has travelled nationally and internationally to share her story. Recognizing the rising threat of climate shocks, SEWA now supports her community with parametric heat insurance and a Livelihood Recovery and Resilience Fund to safeguard their futures.

Tahira Banu from Ladakh

In the remote valleys of Ladakh, single mother Tahira Banu struggled to support her four children with limited seasonal work. She first connected with SEWA before the COVID-19 lockdown, and once conditions eased, SEWA's organizers brought her to Ahmedabad for training in food processing and bakery skills. Armed with new expertise and a ₹100,000 loan from her brother, Tahira launched a bakery business that would become a lifeline for her family.

Her success led to an invitation to become a SEWA centre coordinator, where she taught countless other women these same skills. Under her guidance, more than 7,000 women in Ladakh and Kargil formed food processing and garmenting cooperatives, collectively employing 400 women year-round in a region once limited to six months of farm work. Tahira's story highlights how SEWA's combination of skill development, collective organization, and unwavering support can turn isolation and economic hardship into sustainable entrepreneurship and community resilience.

Allies to Advocates: Transforming the Narrative around Gender Roles

True gender equity cannot be achieved without changing societal attitudes and narratives around gender roles. This requires engaging men and boys as active participants in the journey towards equity while addressing cultural shifts that challenge traditional gender norms.

Why Men Should Be Advocates for Gender Equity

- **Liberation from Stereotypes:** Men are also confined by rigid gender stereotypes that dictate they must be strong, stoic, and the sole providers. Advocating for gender equity can liberate them from these pressures, allowing them to express a wider range of emotions and behaviours without societal judgement.
- **Improved Emotional Well-being:** By embracing gender diversity, men can shed the "emotional weight" of having to conform to being the primary or sole breadwinner within a narrow definition of masculinity. They can follow their own passion and interest or even be the primary homemaker, if they so choose and this can lead to better mental health and a more fulfilling life.
- **Better Relationships and Partnerships:** As women become more financially independent and empowered, traditional power dynamics in relationships shift. Women can share financial responsibilities and men can share home responsibilities that lead to better empathy on both sides. This is likely to have healthier, more equitable, and longer-lasting relationships built on mutual respect rather than control.
- **Enhanced Family Stability:** There is an increasing trend of divorces being initiated by financially independent women in urban India, who are looking for mutual respect and equitable responsibility. Men who embrace this, not only see greater stability and richer relationships in marital life but set an example for the next generation.
- **Societal Progress:** Gender inequality harms everyone, not just women. When men step up as allies and advocates, communities become fairer, more prosperous, and more cohesive.

Practical Steps that Men Can Take as Male Allies for Gender Equality

"Research shows that men are more likely to listen to other men when discussing gender issues."

–Francois Bourgoin, Founder, Managing & Creative Director, Graffiti wll

In society in general

- **Challenge Harmful Masculinity** - Men must call out jokes or comments that equate "macho" with dominance over women. Men can play a crucial role in dismantling this harmful notion and promoting healthier, more respectful forms of masculinity.
- **See Women as Whole Individuals** - One of the most subtle yet damaging forms of bias is when women are respected only for their relation to the men in their lives—as mother, sister, daughter, or wife. However, men must value women for their individuality, independent of the male association.
- **Educate Men on the Tangible Benefits of Gender Equality for Everyone** - Schools should initiate discussions around benefits of gender equity and the practical manifestation of this. Men should call

out disrespectful or gender biased statements or decisions. Do not forward macho jokes/mimes built at the expense of women or promoting stereotypes.

- **Normalize Respectful Conversations** - Men need to normalize respectful conversations about gender equality within their male circles, not just in formal settings. Men in male-dominated environments need to be respectful of women even when women are not present.

Within the home and as parents

- **Participate in Domestic Work** - Men should actively participate in household chores and share responsibilities. They must treat household tasks as mutual responsibilities, not “help” they provide.
- **Find Joy in Being an Equal and Active Parent** - Men must take genuine pleasure in caregiving—school runs, bedtime stories, doctor visits—and model it for their peers. Men are equal parents and embracing their emotive side in this role serves as a rewarding and positive experience.
- **Set Positive Examples for Sons** - Given that children learn by observing, fathers too must demonstrate equality through their actions at home. They must teach sons to respect women and daughters to expect respect, and they must show both by example. Men who advocate for gender equity become positive role models for the next generation of men.
- **Be Respectful in Communication** - Men should be mindful of how they address women in all settings, from colleagues to household staff. They need to be inclusive, respectful terms with everyone in and around their home—colleagues, domestic staff, service workers.

At the workplace

As managers and leaders, men must show genuine sensitivity and intent towards gender equity, which can be via:

- **Assess Without Biases** - Assessing women workers based on their performance and not on face time or time spent in the office will help managers utilize a diverse talent pool.
- **Be Mindful While Hiring** - Actively recruiting more women, genuinely supporting their growth, listening to their perspectives, and valuing their opinions will help retain more women.
- **Take Joy in Mentoring** - Mentoring younger women and potential female leaders in their careers and offering genuine praise for their contributions will lead to a stronger pipeline of women leaders.
- **Refrain From Being Silent** - Male colleagues must call out microaggressions when, they hear a sexist remark or see biased behaviour. They must intervene where needed, as silence equals consent.

“I have seen men up close who genuinely trust people. I think that it is so important if, as a manager, you trust people for the value that they bring, not whether they have kids or elderly parents to look after. Because everyone's going to have something outside of work, right - I think if you can trust and if you can say, I have your back and when I see you deliver, I will give you more.”

–Manasi Narasimhan, Head Communication & Strategic Partnership, CEGIS

The Role of Media in Changing Gender Norms

Another vital stakeholder in this process is the media. Media often reinforce these stereotypes and news stories rarely challenge deep-rooted inequalities. Media doesn't just mirror society — it actively scripts what's seen as acceptable, aspirational, and admirable. Whether it's the stories people binge on OTT platforms, the faces they see on primetime news, or the subtle cues in everyday ads, media sets the tone for gender norms. And that makes it a powerful space for transformation.

Media has the power and responsibility — to change the narrative. There are already visible shifts, and it is evident that change isn't just possible; it's often celebrated when done authentically. Even small choices — like a man cooking in a cooking oil ad — signal big steps in normalizing shared responsibilities. But these changes are still sporadic and often drowned out by dominant narratives.

The pace of change is slow. There are several factors holding media back from becoming less stereotypical and more enabling:

- **Profit Pressures** - Media is a business. Narrative risks—especially those that challenge tradition—may alienate mainstream audiences or threaten revenue, especially with brands beholden to shareholders.
- **Trolling & Backlash** - The digital age makes outrage go viral. Brands like Tanishq and Titan, which launched progressive campaigns around interfaith harmony or gender roles, had to face severe backlash and even pulled ads. The fear of controversy creates a chilling effect on bolder messaging.
- **Lopsided Messaging** - Many ads empower women, but leave men out of the conversation, reinforcing the idea that gender equity is “a woman's issue.” True change needs inclusive storytelling that engages men as allies, not bystanders.
- **Soloed Role Models:** Female-led narratives in Bollywood or on OTT platforms are still framed as niche or “special interest.” There is a lack of consistent, relatable gender-equitable role models across media genres.

The media space isn't monolithic. It includes traditional print, TV news, Bollywood, OTT, social media, and advertising. Within these, some forces reinforce stereotypes, often drawing on deep-seated cultural norms — like glorifying female self-sacrifice or idealizing burnout. But there are also disruptors — storytellers, brands, journalists, and creators who challenge the status quo, who must be amplified and supported.

While systemic overhauls are hard, subtle changes are both feasible and powerful. These would include:

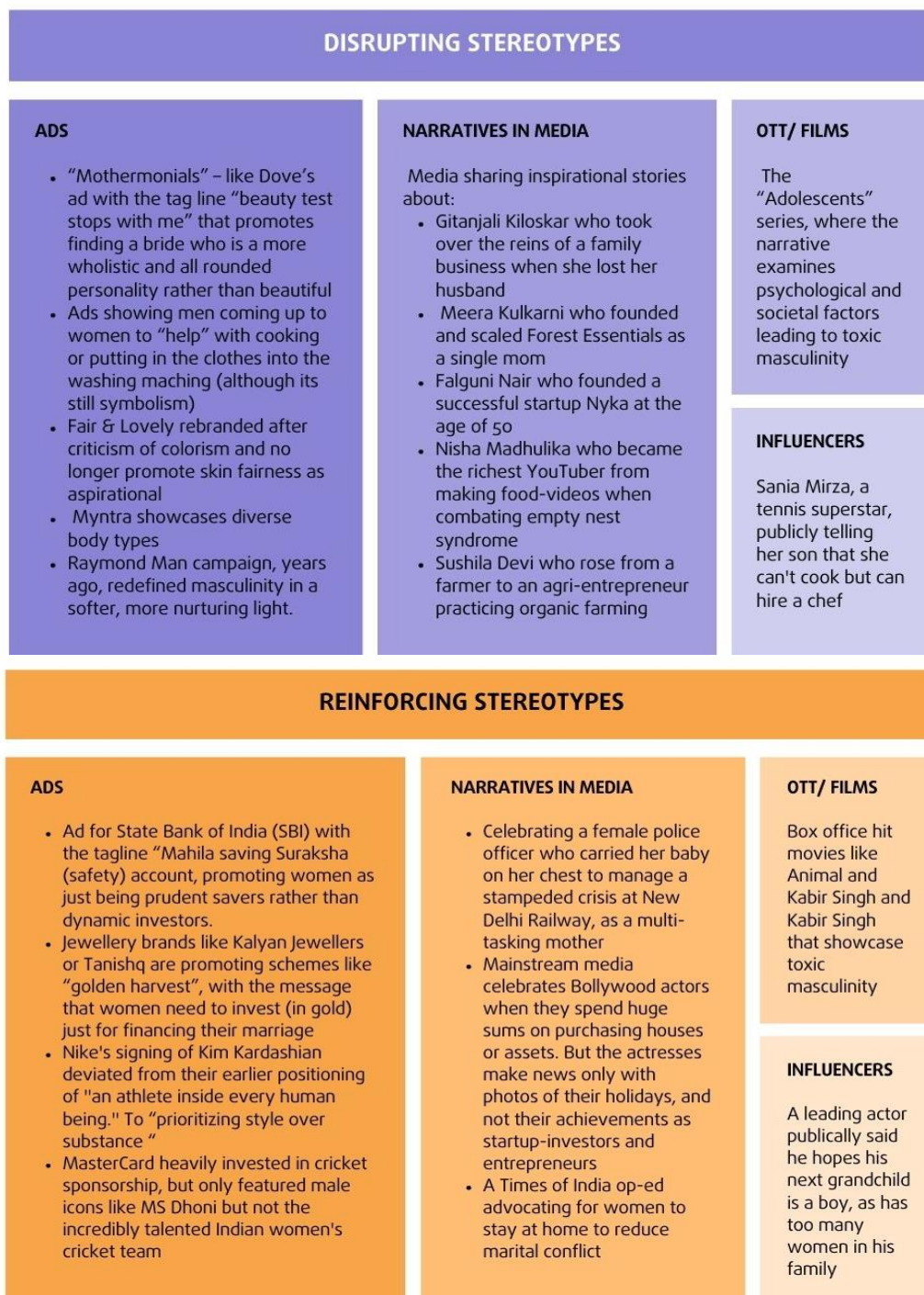
- **Portraying men in caregiving or domestic roles**, highlighting healthy, non-toxic forms of masculinity, ensuring gender-sensitive storytelling in newsrooms.
- **Making space for female commentators**, like Anjum Chopra, in male-dominated fields like sports journalism.
- **Bringing diversity in media staffing** also makes a difference. Female journalists and anchors bring new perspectives and emotional intelligence to storytelling — around all issues. A balanced newsroom doesn't just feel fair — it produces better journalism.

“Media houses themselves are both victims and agents of gender portrayals. They inherit stereotypes but also have the power to reshape them. The key lies in choosing when and how to nudge narratives forward without triggering backlash or losing viewership - Should media reflect existing societal norms, or challenge them? The answer isn't simple.”

– **Ruhail Amin, Senior Editor, exchange4media & BW Businessworld**

Ultimately, the question for the media is not just *what will sell*—but *what kind of society is it helping build?* With thoughtful choices and conscious storytelling, the media can become not just a reflection of gender norms— but a powerful tool to transform them.

Figure 5: Media can disrupt as well as reinforce stereotypes



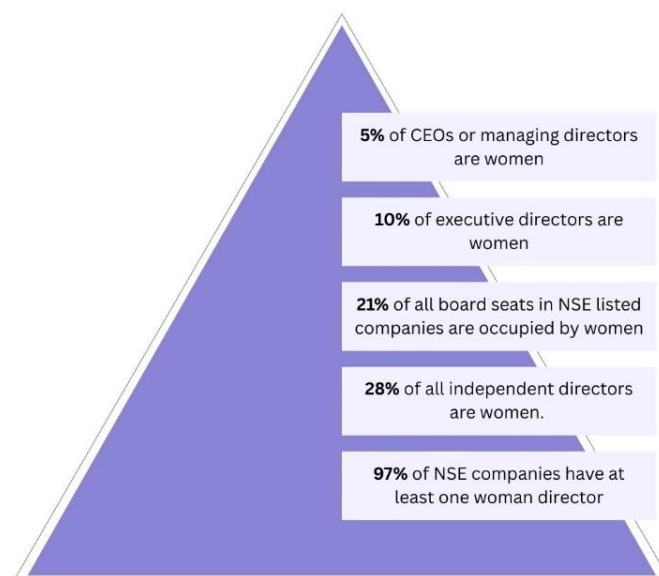
Policy Interventions for a Gender-Equal Future: What's Next?

"Ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women is smart economics."

–Ambassador May-Elin Stener

Policies shape societies—and when crafted intentionally, they can dismantle deeply entrenched gender disparities. While India has made progress through measures like mandating women's representation on corporate boards and addressing workplace harassment via legislation, changing inheritance laws, several challenges persist. Notably, women's representation in executive leadership remains low, the percentage of women entrepreneurs is low, and female labour force participation still lags behind global averages.

Figure 6: Proportion of Women at Board-level Leadership in India



**NSE – National Stock Exchange of India*

A future-ready policy framework must go beyond welfare-based models to actively promote and enable women's economic participation and leadership. This shift requires more targeted and systemic interventions—ones that recognize and address the nuanced realities women face across sectors.

The next wave of gender-responsive policymaking must prioritize enabling structures—physical, institutional, and legal—that support women as equal contributors in both formal and informal economies. Some key policy interventions discussed at the conference include:

- **Developing Supportive Urban Infrastructure** - Developing integrated business parks with essential facilities like crèches, fitness centres, and restaurants can significantly support working women's needs and improve their work-life balance.
- **Accessible Public Infrastructure** - Ensuring well-lit streets, clean public restrooms for women, and safe commuting options—especially for those working night shifts or in remote areas.
- **Land Reforms** - Decoupling agricultural policies and government schemes from land entitlement would ensure that women, who are increasingly active in agriculture but often don't own land, can access these benefits. Alternative mechanisms, like linking to the e-Shram portal, can be explored.

- **Localized Midday Meal Programs** - Mandating the inclusion of locally sourced and culturally appropriate menus in the midday meal scheme will improve the nutritional value and participation of girls in education. This will also have the spill over impact of strengthening local economies and women's roles within them.
- **Formalizing Gender Frameworks** - Integrating gender-inclusion metrics in corporate reporting and auditing practices are crucial for sustainability. For instance, gender-inclusive facilities (like crèche and lactation rooms) can be institutionalized via law, audits and enforcement by entities like the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.
- **Institutionalizing Work from Home** - Recognizing its success during the pandemic, policies should facilitate remote work for suitable roles to better accommodate women's responsibilities and tap into talent pools beyond major metropolitan areas.
- **Ease of Doing Business for Informal Women Workers** - Simplifying complex taxation laws and regulations around organizing economic enterprises will make it easier for semi-literate or illiterate women in the informal sector to formalize and scale their businesses, moving them up the value chain. Additionally, reducing the complex documentation requirements for accessing various policies to make them more accessible to women who may lack traditional forms of documentation.
- **Increase awareness of Existing Policies** - Governments need to partner with civil society organizations, grassroots movements, and women's organizations to improve outreach, awareness, education, and linkages to existing gender-related policies.
- **Increase Women in Policymaking** - True transformation requires women at the table. Whether in Parliament, Gram Sabhas, or boardrooms, meaningful representation ensures that policies reflect real-world gender dynamics. Women face numerous obstacles in politics—from family resistance to systemic bias in media and campaign financing. Policies must directly address these constraints, including through electoral reservations.

Indian policymakers must take inspiration from countries that are leaders in gender parity, like Norway (Box 3) or, closer home, more gender-focused emerging markets like Thailand (Figure 7).

Box 3: Becoming the Leader in Gender Parity: Lessons from Norway's Policymaking

Norway boasts one of the highest female employment rates globally (75% of women and 80% of men in the workforce, almost equal). Women's participation in the workforce has contributed *more* to Norway's economy than its oil and gas resources. It is estimated that Norway avoided a US\$317 billion income loss due to gender equality policies.

Norway's success in achieving high levels of gender parity is a result of a long-term, deliberate strategy involving strong legal frameworks, proactive government policies, the demand for representation from women themselves, and a recognition of the significant economic and social benefits of an equal society. While challenges remain at the highest leadership levels, Norway serves as a compelling example of how intentional choices can lead to a more gender-equal nation.

Key Factors in Norway's Progress:

- **Clear Acknowledgment and Proactive Policies:** Norway recognized early on that gender equality doesn't happen naturally and actively pursued it through deliberate policies and laws.
- **Strong Legal Framework:** Legislation promoting gender equality was introduced over 40 years ago and forms the bedrock of their current equal society.
- **Long-Term Commitment and Steady Progress:** Achieving gender equality has been a gradual process since the 1970s, with consistent efforts towards improvement.
- **Women's Own Demand for Space:** The push for greater representation, particularly in politics, came from women themselves demanding a seat at the table.

- **Political Leadership and Setting the Standard:** The first female Prime Minister in 1986, Gro Harlem Brundtland, made a significant breakthrough by ensuring gender balance in her cabinet (8 out of 18 ministers were women). This set a lasting precedent, with no subsequent Prime Minister daring to have less than 40% women in the cabinet.
- **High Female Representation in Politics:** Norway has consistently had a significant percentage of women in parliament, reaching 46% currently, and has also achieved equality in local governing bodies. The increased representation of women in politics directly influenced the laws and decisions taken, laying the foundation for gender equality policies.
- **Enabling Workforce Policies:** A suite of policies facilitated women's participation in the workforce, including:
 - **Parental Leave:** Up to 12 months, shared between parents, reducing employer bias against hiring women.
 - **Affordable Childcare (by law):** Enabling both parents to work.
 - **Family-Oriented Work Policies:** Accepting that employees need to balance work with childcare.
 - **Mandatory Gender Quotas for Corporate Boards:** Norway was a pioneer in introducing mandatory quotas requiring at least 40% female representation on corporate boards in both public and private limited companies.

Figure 7: Policy Best Practices from Thailand (An Asian Leader on Gender Equality Metrics)



Source: Bridging the Gender Gap Report⁷

⁷https://www.india.talentnomics.org/files/ugd/b10a3a_d2a5086c441e45ea984ee16695e514f5.pdf

Concluding Thoughts

“The gender gap is multifaceted. It is not just in one sphere or the other. And these do not operate in silos but are all interlinked. There are interdependencies, one feeds the other. Currently, it has just become a huge thing to deal with”

– **Kshama Kaushik, Director, Thought Arbitrage Research Institute**

The compelling narratives and insightful reflections shared throughout this discussion underscore the deeply ingrained nature of gender bias and the significant, yet surmountable, challenge of reshaping societal perceptions. What emerged powerfully is that real change does not begin in boardrooms or policies alone—it begins in homes, in the language people use, the choices they make, the biases they challenge, and the voices they amplify. True transformation is forged in the everyday, in the way people raise their children, share domestic responsibilities, mentor across gender lines, and speak up when they see injustice. The onus is on each of us to consciously build a world where power, influence, and resources are equitably distributed—regardless of gender.

The evidence is clear: gender-equal societies are not merely just; they are demonstrably more prosperous, exhibiting stronger economic growth, reduced rates of violence, and enhanced social harmony.

As Ambassador May-Elin Stener wisely stated, *“All of us who have the power today to make gender equality a reality in our lifetime — we must act. Good intentions are not enough. Change demands action. And real transformation happens in the small, everyday steps: speaking up, mentoring, challenging bias.”* The projected 134-year wait for equality is not an acceptable future. The urgency now demands an unwavering commitment of each individual.

Yet, the persistent reality of male dominance in leadership across political and corporate spheres globally presents a significant systemic barrier. True acceleration of gender equity necessitates a focused effort to address this imbalance at the highest levels, where cultural and organizational norms are often established.

“The path is sometimes a little slow, but change always takes time. There's no magic wand to make this happen.”

— **Kanchan Chehal, Global HR Leader & CHRO Board, TM and DEI Advisor**

Looking ahead, the landscape of gender parity is increasingly intricate. While pockets of progress demonstrate the potential of bold initiatives, the concerning rise of resistance and rollbacks creates a fragmented global reality. Navigating this complex terrain demands nuanced, context-specific policies, strategic collaborations, and decisive actions at all levels – individual, organizational, and governmental – to ensure that the promise of a truly equitable world is realized.

To restore the Equiverse, what is needed is not just policies but also purpose; not just dialogue but also direction; and not just intent but also impact.

“I promised myself that every day that I live from now, I'm going to help other women realize their dreams. And I can say safely, I have stayed true to that.”

– **Kanta Singh, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women India**

Guests of Honor



AMB. MAY-ELIN STENER

Ambassador of Norway to India and
Sri Lanka



NEELAM DHAWAN

Board Member, Mentor & Advisor
Former MD, HP



KANTA SINGH

Deputy Country Representative,
UN Women India

Featured Speakers

 <p>SRIKANT SASTRI Chairman, GDPDC</p>	 <p>KANCHAN CHEHAL Global HR Leader, Talent Management & DEI Advisor</p>	 <p>MANASI NARASIMHAN Head Communication & Strategic Partnership, CEGIS</p>	 <p>CRIS PEREZ Senior Project Manager, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung</p>	 <p>FRANCOIS BOURGOIN Founder, Managing & Creative Director, Graffiti wll</p>
 <p>NAMRATA KOHLI Columnist, Journalist and Author</p>	 <p>NEETI KATOCH Gender Specialist, Private Sector Operations, ADB</p>	 <p>PAUL LINNARZ Head of KAS, Country Office Japan & Economics Program SOPAS</p>	 <p>MANIKA AWASTHI CPO, Compass Group India</p>	 <p>RITVIK LUKOSE Lawyer, Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of Vahura</p>
 <p>ANISHA MOTWANI Brand & Strategy Expert Founder, STORM the NORM Ventures</p>	 <p>KISHORE AJWANI Managing Editor, News18 India</p>	 <p>FARZANA CHOWDHURY MD & CEO, Green Delta Insurance Co. Ltd.</p>	 <p>RUHAIL AMIN Journalist</p>	 <p>KSHAMA KAUSHIK Director, Thought Arbitrage Research Institute</p>
 <p>MANSI SHAH Senior Coordinator, SEWA</p>		 <p>IPSITA KATHURIA Founder, TalentNomics India</p>		

About TalentNomics India

TalentNomics India is a non-profit organisation. Our purpose is Restore the 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
- Sanjay Kohli

About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)

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:

- Paul Linnarz
- Cristita Perez
- Shojiro Kusumoto

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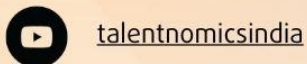
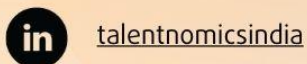
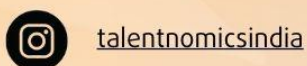


*Map is not drawn to scale and is for visual representation only

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