

Roundtable Discussion Report

*HIGH LEVEL CLOSED-DOOR ROUNDTABLE ON INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY:
OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN INCLUSIVE AGENDA*

10 August 2022

Hosted by
Kubernein Initiative

In Partnership with
India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

OVERVIEW:

Format: Virtual closed door roundtable event held under Chatham House rule

Objective and Context for the Roundtable:

This roundtable was a continuation of engagement of Kubernein Initiative (KI) and the India Office of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) to understand opportunities for India to bring an inclusionary lens to various areas of foreign policy. Multilateral engagement is an important avenue for such an endeavour. Further, seven countries in the G20 group have announced or are working towards feminist foreign policies. The objective of this closed-door discussion was to gain a broader perspective on the various intersections for gender within the G20 framing including:

- Identifying key opportunities and challenges for India, in setting the agenda for its upcoming G20 presidency.
- Understanding where an inclusive perspective may be brought in to the G20 workings.
 - If the agenda of India's G20 is inclusive development, what does inclusive mean in practice?
 - G20 countries coming together, interact along foreign policy axes. Can gender then be incorporated as a cross-cutting feature of shared G20 principles?
 - How do the Women 20 (W20) outputs integrate with the multilateral reach/influence of the G20?
- How can some of the core ideas of FFP/gender mainstreaming aid a potential W20 discussion? What are the key areas of engagement that can buttress both the W20 and bring about meaningful engagement in the G20 as well?
- Developing actionable policy recommendations that can ultimately lead to a more inclusive G20.

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS:

Perspectives on the changing nature of the G20

- Over time, the G20, primarily a grouping to engage on economic issues, has been diluted, and in trying to resolve multiple problems it is digressing from its core competencies and ideas on economic themes, into themes such as climate change. While this by itself is an extremely important issue, but it is not necessarily a G20 issue.
- The G20 needs to engage with strategic issues. While gender is an extremely important component, at a crucial time such as this, a discussion of gender fitting into the G20 may again detract from the main focus of the G20, which may not be the best option for keeping the focus of the G20 on economic and security issues. It will also not serve gender aspects in a fulfilling manner.

- With global growth rates stagnating, leaders of the G20 need to sharply bring back their focus on economics. Economics cannot be course corrected without first addressing the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has led to growing food insecurity and energy shortages.
- We cannot leave out an important issue today: that of security, particularly in context of the Ukraine war. The G20 group should ultimately work towards reducing poverty, building good governance practices, and increasing sustainable development, especially in a post-pandemic world. However it was discussed that gender cannot be separated from these areas of governance, and perhaps a more integrated approach might be useful. There are some issues in the way in which the G20 functions. For one, parallel tracks with multiple priorities can deviate from the main goal. The entire world is intent on joining multilateral groupings, and problems need to be called out more explicitly, else nothing will come out of these groupings.
- Gender cannot be treated as a soft issue, certainly not in 2023. A lot of traditional attitudes and mindsets need changing. One cannot talk about the ambitious economic growth that the G20 aspires towards, without talking about gender at the grass-root level.
- Important global gatherings like BRICS, G20, G7, etc. are trying to problem-solve without involving the United Nations, which is the only organisation that has the legitimacy to offer solutions. The failure of the United Nations in doing so is pushing smaller groups to fix multiple problems at once.
- Digital inclusion, one of the main pillars of the G20 and the W20, has helped and improved financial inclusion for women, and could be an area of convergence. The expedited number of Indian women who have access to bank accounts shows the progress of the Indian government in digital inclusion.
- Robust economic growth is not possible without the participation of women. Data shows that the participation of women has led to incremental and substantial economic growth. The question then arises - how do we divert the benefits of that economic growth back to women? Women's participation has led to economic growth, but conversely, it does not promote more women participating in the economy. The G20 should consider taking some strong steps towards institutionalising gender within the system.

Perspectives on the role and workings of the W20

- The W20 is pivotal amongst the many engagement groups of the G20. Instrumentalities may vary, the concept of Feminist Foreign Policy is new, but they affect the G20, and the G20 response affects 60% of the female population in the world.
- Since 2015, W20 presidencies have been working on issues of inclusion and parity. Economic, labour, and digital inclusion continue to be the main pillars of W20. While the conversation began with 'inclusion', it has moved to 'parity' as the objective. Over time, the scope of the W20 has expanded to include newer and emerging issues.

- The Indonesia W20 summit factored the interests of rural women, which many countries have tried to bring up, since it is a Global South reality - economic growth is incomplete without the rural economy.
- There should be continuity between the W7 and W20 engagement, which should be inclusive of diverse opinions and working groups like the BRICS. The W20 should try to align with these existing groups. The W7 engagement group under Germany's G7 Presidency was significant for example, because it included people from countries other than the G7.
- It is worth asking whether the W20 is just an engagement group created to discuss gender issues, rather than having a serious commitment to how the outcomes and recommendations can be integrated into the policies at G20 level and then at every country's level.
- Over the years, the W20 has emerged as elite, non-transparent, non-inclusive and non-participatory. The process itself needs to be inclusive and progressive, and also transparent. Silos of conversations on gender are not enough, and need to be mainstreamed, and the W20 can engage with other groups as well.
- One of the problems with W20 and other similar groups is the lack of an advocacy strategy. Nothing much occurs after the main summit, and we need to move away from the model that centers the W20 communique as the main outcome of the W20.
- There is a need to build a new framework for the W20 with our efforts, and inclusion and transparency is the crucial base of all work. It is also necessary to have constant discussions with governments and have a platform to share experiences. There are no gender-neutral issues, and investing in social infrastructure can be a step forward in acknowledging this.

Perspectives on the intersections between G20, W20, gender and inclusion:

- It is a mistake to think there are gender-neutral issues all together and that economic development and security can be one of them. Beginning with the impact of the pandemic - we know that it was not gender neutral. Twice as many women lost their jobs as men. We need to understand the importance of having a gender focus. During Australia's G20 presidency, there was an understanding that there had to be a concrete goal to get more women into the labour market and close the gap of labour market participation. This led to the creation of the goal '25 by 25', or, closing the gap by 25% by 2025.
- Since the G20 agenda focuses on economic growth and prosperity, it is important to protect all marginalised communities, including rural communities, farmers, and specifically women farmers.
- There should be a post-presidency mechanism after the communique that is released by G20 engagement groups - for example, following up after the release of the W20 communique can be taken on by women's rights/empowerment ministries, similar to how finance ministers from all G20 countries have meetings to follow up on financial regulation issues. To track progress on this front, meetings would have to be convened more frequently.
- During Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency there were mechanisms to plug elements of the W20 communique at various checkpoints to ensure integration into the G20.

- We can perhaps rethink the use of word gender - the question is about equal participation of men and women, whereas gender is a social role assigned to men and women.
- There is a noteworthy change from the use of the term ‘women centric policies’ to ‘women-led initiatives’.
- Geo-economic issues are at the centre stage as far as G20 is concerned, and there has been an organic increase in women’s empowerment over the years.

Considerations for India’s G20 presidency

- The expectations of India’s G20 presidency are very high, but there is time still for the handover of the presidency to India from Indonesia, which has been mired by rising US-China tensions and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and from which there are lessons to be learnt. Indonesia has shown tremendous leadership in not succumbing to pressure from around the world and moving forward with the summit.
- One of the biggest challenges for the G20 is that Indian issues could be overshadowed by developments in Europe or issues between China and the US. Keeping in mind the inclusive agenda, it is important to understand the linkages between domestic and foreign issues.
- The G20 is likely to be Indo-centric and might not align with the G7. It is also an opportunity for a Global South approach and for South-South cooperation and must sync with other groupings like BRICS. India needs to be in a position where it can transform the way the G20 works.
- India has a seat on the same table as Russia, China, the USA, and the EU, and can leverage the very powerful mechanism that brings countries together to the same table.
- India is in a unique position and has the opportunity to reconcile the agenda of the Global South, with the sustainable development goals. Mainstreaming gender in these conversations or using the W20 platform are both options going forward, especially since India’s G20 themes of equitable and inclusive development align closely.
- The conversation on gender mainstreaming in the G20 is a timely one to have. In the case of Germany, during its G7 presidency, there have been several rights, resources, and opportunities for women, in development and foreign and trade policy. The potential for G20 under India’s presidency is immense, with New Delhi’s rapid expansion, global footprint, and growing presence.
- It is important to recognise that multilateralism involves trade-offs, such as trade-offs between effectiveness and inclusiveness, and to therefore balance these trade-offs and find solutions for them.
- On the question of inclusiveness, gender is important part of the conversation, but the conversation must evolve to include all the voices of the voiceless, and all marginalized communities. The G20 taking place in three global south countries is an opportunity to mainstream issues of exclusion, and to arrive at sustainable solutions.

ANNEXURE

Links and readings shared by the participants over the course of the discussion:

- ‘Paid work, women’s empowerment and inclusive growth: Transforming the structures of constraint’:
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/1/paid-work-womens-empowerment-and-inclusive-growth>
- ‘Policy Guidebook: Harnessing Digital Technology for Financial Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific’:
<https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/policy-guidebook-harnessing-digital-technology-financial-inclusion-asia-and-pacific-0>
- ‘Women and the G20’: <http://pwescr.org/Women-and-G20-final-paper.pdf>
- ‘Digital Futures: Leveraging G20 for UK-India Cooperation’:
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/digital-futures/>
- ‘Unlocking Sustainable Finance to Promote Green Transition: India’s Priorities for its G20 Presidency in 2023’:
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/unlocking-sustainable-finance-to-promote-green-transition/>
- ‘Leveraging the Global Macroeconomic Environment for Recovery and Growth: Opportunities for G20 Under India’s Presidency’:
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/opportunities-for-g20-under-indias-presidency/>
- ‘What will India’s G20 Presidency Focus On?’:
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/what-will-indias-g20-presidency-focus-on/>
- ‘Multilateralism, Liberal Values, and the Global South’:
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/21st-Century-Multilateralism.pdf#page=69>
- ‘Opportunities for a More Inclusive Indian Foreign Policy’:
<https://kuberneininitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Opportunities-for-a-more-Inclusive-Indian-Foreign-Policy.pdf>

About Kubernein Initiative:

Kubernein Initiative is an independent, female led, geopolitical advisory firm based in Mumbai (India) working to mainstream issues that need greater intellectual capacity and focus. Our vision is to build an organisation that considers critical questions with a perspective that balances traditionally ‘western’ thought in the field of international relations and diplomacy with new and emerging ideas from the global south.

About Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS):

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. We cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong

partnerships along the way. Together with our partners, we make a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible manner. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas:

1. Foreign and Security Policy
2. Economic, Climate and Energy Policy
3. Rule of Law
4. Political Dialogue focussed on Social and Political Change
5. Media and Youth

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