

KAS-ORF INDO-GERMAN WOMEN'S LEADERS INITIATIVE, 6th DECEMBER 2022

EVENT REPORT

Roundtable Discussion | Perspectives from India-Germany: Women's Leadership on SDGs and Green Growth



Several developments in recent years have necessitated a serious dialogue to catalyse women's leadership, mainstream women entrepreneurship, and drive investment in women-led enterprises and institutions around the world. Building consensus around women's led development remains critical to drive key economic opportunities, skill building, progressive legislation and their instrumental roles in fostering partnerships in achieving long term inclusive benefits within the 2030 Development Agenda.

Silhouetted with a 'women's led development' framework, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in collaboration with the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, organised a closed door roundtable discussion on, "**Perspectives from India-Germany: Women's Leadership on SDGs and Green Growth**", on 6th December 2022. Attended by a high level German women leader's delegation along with some of the brightest women development experts across public and private sector from India, diverse viewpoints were exchanged on the current conversations around women's leadership competencies and the key areas that need to be prioritized to uphold and accelerate global SDGs.

Chairing this discussion Dr. Shamika Ravi, Vice-President ORF, laid out three clear verticals that set up the tone of the conversations: a) building consensus on coherent gender development issues, b) zeroing down on key priorities areas in setting up women's agency in sustainable development and c) designing pathways to advance inclusive and sustainable societies filtered through a 'women's led growth agenda', within the framework of Indo-German Development Partnerships. With India holding this year's G20 Presidency, these catalytic gender narratives can then be voiced in reimagining women as architects of a progressive development agenda.

Acknowledging the increasing pressure on multilateral systems and the international rules-based order to deliver on solutions to global challenges, Lena Düpont, Member of the European Parliament, laid out shared values of democracy and mutual concerns on green transition and sustainability along with knowledge exchange as drivers of change. Reiterating that India's G20 Presidency is a dynamic opportunity to exchange views on regional and global development dialogues, Ms. Düpont was joined by other fellow delegates who outlined the growing need for women's leadership roles in sustainable energy workforce, in C-suite roles as well as in political and public spheres. Maintaining that a gender-responsive climate policy can well counteract gender inequality, Ms. Wiebke Winter called upon measures to raise awareness about women's roles to lead climate change mitigation for green growth, food security and impact reduction. Appending on to the gender and climate change nexus, Ms. Dipa Singh Bagai emphasised the power of women-led initiatives for enhancing green growth. Pointing out the immense potential of clean energy and climate based solutions for empowering livelihoods of women, she noted out that initiatives in India have enabled women's opportunities at the grassroots level to accessibility and affordability of clean energy. Ms. Suranjali Tandon, added that greater access to sustainable and equitable green finance is bound to aid women as frontrunners in the global energy transition. She highlighted that adoption of proper climate financing mechanisms will not only empower women but also improve livelihoods.

Lauding Delhi's impressive 'green cover', Ms. Franziska Schütte-Sökeland spoke about the critical need to recognise gender equality in forest landscape restoration, and identify gender gaps related to natural resources and restoration processes. To be able to find sustainable solutions, social aspects of conservation, agriculture and forestry need to be valorised with bringing in more women on board as active agents of change, she explained. Responding to her remarks, Dr. Ravi touched upon an interesting fact that although the 'green-cover' in India tends to shift owing to rapid urbanisation, efforts are underway to expand its coverage by adopting a 'crowd-source methodology', of measurement at the district levels. She elaborated by saying that such initiatives can be turned into financial instruments for carbon-credits to aid regions in maintaining their bio-diversity.

Women leaders as role models, need to do much more to build a pipeline of talented GenNext movers and shakers, added Ms. Sophie Ramdor, Member of State Parliament of Lower Saxony. She emphasized that leadership roles need skills to fit into positions of power, requiring a fundamental shift in identities as also adapting to the roles and these can turn problematic for those women who aspire to be in their shoes. Resonating similar concerns, Ms. Meghna Bal, focused on overcoming gender tokenism in the workplace and how in spite of the regulatory push for companies to

mandate at least one independent women director on boards, a majority of them end up in side-lined committees.

Ms. Clara von Nathusius, passionately questioned the gender power relations in society and the way it plays out when this power balance gets disrupted, more so with a woman in control, these quiescent rules reflect women's disconfirming relationships with leadership as well. She went on to elaborate that this is especially stark in workplace cultures that are more masculine, with an environment socialised into reinforcing gender stereotypes, women find it even more problematic to support each other.

Effective leadership should be able to inspire other women by addressing structural gender biases often internalised by women themselves since their early childhood years. Citing Dr. Angela Merkel's long stint as Chancellor, Ms. Vivien Keilbar stated that it is perhaps unrealistic to assume that one leader single-handedly can bring sweeping changes around gendered roles. An increase in numbers at the top of the pyramid will then percolate to areas that impede women's growth, particularly advocating for gender pay parity and creating women-friendly work environment with family support options for work life balance, she maintained. Ms. Shikha Bhasin rued that although a significant percentage of women are entering the workforce they often find themselves on the other side of the fence when they aspire to get into boardrooms as leaders. India leads over the US and Germany in the percentage of STEM graduates but their inability to garner top jobs is indicative enough to find solutions across the landscape of governance, she added. Worthwhile to note that climate change conversations are now in a position to offer non-elitist solutions like de-centralisation, renewable energy moving beyond accessibility alone to productive use to bettering livelihoods.

Adding a word of caution as we reach the half-way mark to 2030, Ms. Radhika K. Batra stepped up the call to scrutinise the overarching challenges that imperil the progress on gender equality and the SDG's. Pointing out some factual data, she surmised that having women in decision making, especially at the 'Panchayat' level roles, allows them to address local needs and facilitate the design of public policies that are directly beneficial to their communities like access to water and education. She equivocally called upon women leaders to pivot transformation in the current "*mauhol*", (loosely translated here to mean a conducive eco-system) by questioning nuanced gendered dichotomy in our societies by taking action on changing mindsets and recognising linkages that thread the SDG's together as a blueprint for development. Reversing the intergenerational cycle of gender disparity is the need of the hour, observed Ms. Livleen Kahlon, with actionable commitments from across sectors. A good start would be by investing in early education systems that lay the foundation for a profitable 'for gender just' future, she added. Holding the conversation on green growth, Ms. Neha Kumar brought forth the concept of sustainable finance as an important tool for inclusive development as women are particularly vulnerable to intersectional inequalities such as class and ethnicity. The social dimension of carbon pricing still remains a highly contested subject and even limited considerations on its impact on a wide spectrum of metrics, she stressed.



Key Takeaways from the Dialogue

- Firmly convinced of shared Indo-German interests in multilateral responses to global challenges, discussants called for greater action in the light of advancing women's leadership within the framework of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and beyond.
- As long standing members of the "Group of Twenty", experts from both sides culled out some priority areas to intensify their efforts for inclusive development at a momentous point in time when India holds the G20 Presidency with a specific focus to spur women's leadership roles in building resilient, sustainable and climate friendly equitable societies.
- A bottom -up approach has strengthened women's political participation in India which could well be an area of shared best practices between countries.
- Acknowledging the existing gender gap in STEM, experts agreed that to nurture a future generation of women's workforce, enough role models will be required to invoke interest not only in various fields but also incorporating inspiring images in school curriculum, media and in popular cultures.
- Participants at the roundtable touched upon the socio-political aspects and gender roles in forest landscape restoration in order to ensure equitable sharing of benefits. Deepening mutual co-operation for conservation of biodiversity with exchange best practices was another area of interest.
- Facilitating a just energy transition and fostering gender smart climate finance was a critical concern among the speakers from both sides of the table who called upon the greater need for decentralised renewable energy and clean technologies to generate income opportunities for women.

Conclusion

The talks highlighted the immediate need to examine the interlinkages between gender equality through the lens of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and provide solutions for enhancing women's leadership in energy and green recovery, securing top positions in STEM, in corporate boardrooms and in the political sphere, recognising and investing in the care economy, transforming intergenerational gender biased mindsets and bolstering interventions that promote women's leadership role models for future generations.

List of Participants

Chair: Shamika Ravi, Vice President, Economic Policy, ORF
Arundhatie B Kundal, Senior Fellow, ORF

Indian Discussants

- Dipa Singh Bagai, Country Head, NRDC, India
- Shikha Bhasin, Senior Programme Lead in the Technology, Finance and Trade Team, CEEW
- Ulka Kelkar, Director – Climate Program, WRI India
- Livleen K Kahlon, Associate Director, Environment Education and Awareness, TERI
- Suranjali Tandon, Assistant Professor, NIPFP
- Meghna Bal, Fellow, Esya Centre
- Neha Kumar, Programme Manager for Climate Bonds Initiative (CBI)

KAS Representatives

- Adrian Haack, Director, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung India Office
- Pankaj Madan, Team Leader Programme Coordination, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung India Office

German Delegation

- Lena Düpont, MdEP Member of the European Parliament
- Clara von Nathusius, Assistant Director of GPS at Ernst & Young
- Franziska Schütte-Sökeland, District Chairwoman of Junge Union South Westphalia
- Wiebke Winter, Member of CDU Federal Committee, Top candidate for State elections in Bremen
- Vivien-Nathalie Keilbar, Chief of Staff of Dr. Jan Redmann (CDU)
- Sophie Ramdor, Member of State Parliament of Lower Saxony, Deputy State Chairwoman of the Junge Union Niedersachsen

This event report was compiled by Arundhatie Biswas Kundal, Senior Fellow ORF.