



Equi
~~UNIVERSE~~
UNIVERSE
Start the Ripple

**Universe to Equiverse:
Start the Ripple**

**Conference Report
9th-10th Dec, 2021**



EQUIVERSE

talent
nomics
The Ripple of
Change



INDIA

FAIR COLLABORATIVE EQUAL JOY INCLUSION RESPECT ENRICHING
MERCOCRACY CONFIDENCE SAFETY NEUTRAL PEACEFUL
STRESS FREE FAIR PRODUCTIVE COMFORTABLE POWERFUL
EQUAL RIGHTS EQUITARIANISM INDESPENSIBLE NATURAL ORGANIC
UNCOMMITTED NURTURING LOVE UNSTOPPABLE
LEARNING LOGICAL EMPowerMENT RESPECT HARMONY RECOGNITION HAPPINESS
RESPECT THE SAFE INDEPENDENCE REVOLUTIONARY
INSPIRING RIGHTS SUSTAINABLE PEACEFUL HUMAN FREEDOM
HONEST PEACE EQUAL UNBIASED
BALANCE HOLISTIC KINDNESS NURTURING
FREE CHANGE OPPORTUNITY IMAGINATIVE EQUAL

Universe to Equiverse: Start the Ripple

Conference Report

Executive Summary

This report summarises the key take-aways and recommendations from the International Leadership Conference “*Universe to Equiverse: Start the Ripple*”, jointly organised by TalentNomics India and KAS SOPAS. The event was held virtually on December 9th and 10th, 2021. The meeting brought together more than 35 Global Leaders as speakers and panellists, and was attended by over 800 participants.

The main objective of the conference was to share unique and impactful best practices; and deliberate upon actions that can be taken to create a gender-equal world – an “Equiverse”. Global leaders and experts discussed how to enable women to reap an equal share in global prosperity without bearing the disproportionate burden of the challenges. This was visualised in the backdrop of huge and persistent gender gaps, which reflect various facets of the inequality faced by women in all walks of life and have been widened by the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, women’s economic inclusion is critical to economic growth and prosperity; and women’s leadership is vital for creating a ripple effect for restoring balance in the world.

The Conference provided a platform to share and learn from journeys and insights of leaders across sectors and regions, who are engaged in empowering and enabling women. The speakers and panellists acknowledged the need to take a multi-dimensional approach to addressing the gender issue, and provided actionable insights that each of the stakeholders in the ecosystem can take towards building an Equiverse.

Following actionable suggestions for these stakeholders emerged from the discussions at the Conference -

- **Policy makers** - The Government must encourage more women in policymaking and ensure a gender-balance in the Parliament. Policymakers bear the onus of creating better paying and more productive employment opportunities for women as well as of promoting women’s entrepreneurship. They must collect gender-disaggregated data and use it as a vital tool for ex-post gender impact assessments to guide all policy actions.
- **International Organisations** – Development banks and international institutions must strongly commit to the gender equality agenda and mainstream the gender aspect into all sector-specific policies.
- **Corporate Sector** - The private sector needs to adopt innovative practices to create enabling workplaces for women, include women led businesses in their supply chains, enable women to use e-commerce as well as partner with civil society and Governments to undertake initiatives that empower women.
- **Financial Institutions and Banks** - Banks need to make loans more accessible for women by increasing awareness, simplifying processes and not demanding collaterals. Financial Institutions, Venture Capitalists and Funding organisations need to commit to and proactively address the gender gap in capital and funding disbursements.
- **Men and family members**- Men as fathers, must enable daughters to dream big and support them to achieve their dreams. As husbands, they should help build equal and enabling partnerships at home. And as leaders, they must support and encourage women colleagues and push the diversity agenda in their organisations. Similarly, other family members, mainly parents and in-laws, need to be supportive of breaking role stereotypes for women at home.

- **Women** – Individual women must address their confidence gaps and learn to prioritise their happiness. They also need to become role models to other women and become champions of diversity in their organisations.
- **Educational Institutions** - Schools must provide equal and bias free education to girls and boys, and help break gender stereotypes that creep into the mindsets of children.

The panellists agreed that a vital tool that should be used by all stakeholders is technology, which presents many opportunities to impact the lives and livelihood of women globally. Especially in the post-pandemic world, technology will be a great enabler for women, if utilised effectively by all stakeholders. Also imperative, going forward, will be for ecosystem players to collaborate with each other and take joint actions to enable women and create effective solutions at scale. But most of all, each one of us will have to become a Ripple Maker to create a global movement towards gender equality.

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PREFACE

We are delighted to release the report from our 6th Annual Conference on Universe to EQuiverse: Start the Ripple, in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Social Economic Policies in Asia (KAS-SOPAS). This conference focused on how we can shift our Universe that provides dominant opportunities to one gender, to an EQuiverse that offers equal opportunity to all.

*Let's build a world of equals-
Equal opportunity to dream,
Equal access to education,
Equal rights to aspire
Equal freedom to choose.*

*Let not the gender decree that she may succeed
Or set limits to her reach,
Let not gender dictate the path she takes
Or the words she speaks,
the clothes she wears,
friends she makes.*

*Let's give her the space to breath
To speak up and even to laugh loud.
With sights set high, let her soar the skies
Let's be the wind beneath her wings.*

*Her time has come
May we see her to shine
In companies and Board rooms,
Leading countries, commanding troops,
Exploring space and winning the race.*

*It's time for us all to lend a hand
To start a ripple, even a tiny one
To usher in "an EQuiverse"
Where it no longer seems strange
to be seen in equal numbers, with equal voice
Gracing every sphere of our space.*

This is even more important now as women have been far more impacted by the pandemic. The EQuiverse is the need of the hour to create a sustainable world, and the only way to bring this about is for all of us to collaborate together and work towards it without losing any more time.

I am immensely grateful to the leaders who unhesitatingly shared their candid thoughts at the conference. I am delighted that it attracted over 800 men and women to participate in the virtual event. I am grateful to the TalentNomics India conference team for their effort in delivering a flawless and highly impactful conference. We thank KAS-SOPAS again for their support in making this a very successful joint venture. We also thank our other partners, Apraava Energy, HILTI, HCL, CDPQ, Saint Gobain, InfoEdge, Tata Steel, Green Delta Insurance, and Dr.Lal PathLabs for their partnership, and look forward to future collaborations in our joint quest in creating an EQuiverse.



Ipsita Kathuria
Founder & CEO, TalentNomics

I. Introduction

We are well into the 21st century and the Universe has evolved dramatically in terms of intellectual, material, economic and physical prosperity. Unfortunately, this growth has not been balanced because certain sections have gained more than the others. Prosperity around the world has been characterised by a growing divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots”; the developed and the undeveloped; the urban and the rural. One significantly worrying aspect of this inequitable growth has been the persistence of gender gaps. Women continue to receive a miniscule share of the growing opportunities and prosperity, despite being fifty percent of the population. They collectively face greater challenges as compared to men for getting educated, accessing healthcare, finding jobs, and building careers.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly widened many of the existing economic gaps around the World, especially the gender gaps. Particularly stark has been the reality where women have lost much more due to the pandemic. However, very few nations, organizations and leaders have actively intervened to implement women specific policies to address their specific needs and challenges.

This clearly shows that women tend to receive a smaller share of the prosperity but end up facing a larger share of the challenges - indicating a dire necessity to tackle this imbalance with urgent measures. For this, we need inspirational leaders who are ready to take bold and targeted actions and policies. Systemic change calls for collective will, best met through collaboration between change makers among all stakeholders who are impacting the lives and livelihoods of women.

In the backdrop of this, we felt the need to create a platform to share and learn from journeys and insights of leaders across sectors and regions, who are engaged in empowering and enabling women. With the intent of building bridges between such leaders to increase the momentum of change, **TalentNomics India** and **KAS SOPAS** organised the International Leadership Conference “**Universe to Equiverse: Start the Ripple**”. The event was held virtually on **December 9th and 10th, 2021**. It brought together more than 35 Global Leaders as speakers and panellists and was attended by over 800 participants.

The conference focussed on “How do we build a universe that is more equitable-an Equiverse?” To derive the answers to this question, the deliberations centred on:

- Sharing of best practices from the ecosystem (public, private and social sectors) for creating an Equiverse
- Showcasing innovative practices in ‘collaboration’ that are resulting in empowering women at scale
- Unravelling the substantial impact of creating equal opportunities
- Discussing the success parameters for women leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals
- Recognizing individual and organizational trailblazers in creating the new Equiverse

The conference delivered knowledge and insights on the focus issues through structured discussions between experts and practitioners, storytelling, experience sharing, best practice dissemination as well as engagement with participants through Q&As, polls and quizzes. The meeting was divided into eleven live sessions, which included two Keynote addresses, a Valedictory session and eight panel discussions with experts.

Agenda

SESSION 1 - Keynote: HERStory made History: Creating an Equiverse	Rebeca Grynspan shared anecdotes from her personal journey of rising to top leadership roles in the Government and as Head of International Organisations. She also brought out struggles women face as they rise in their careers and how best they can deal with them.
SESSION 2 - Future of Work: Turning the tide with Technology	The panellists dwelt on various ways in which technology and innovation have been helpful in enabling women and how they can be leveraged as tools for advancing women in the future-at rural, semi-rural as well as urban settings.
SESSION 3 - Restoring the Balance: Redefining new Matrix	The panellists deliberated on various best practices that, in their personal experiences, that have helped create more gender equity in organisations. They agreed that a lot has already been done but the need is to accelerate the pace.
SESSION 4 - Collaborating for Change: Together we Win	The panellists focused on the criticality and impact of collaborations between sectors (private and public sectors, or educational institutions, or not for profit sector) to bring about large-scale change for women.
SESSION 5 - Equal Opportunity - the Real Game Changer	Pavithra Govinda Raj shared her inspirational story of surviving adversities of being born to very poor parents in a remote village, graduating from Shanti Bhavan and achieving her role in an MNC.
SESSION 6 - Keynote: HERStory made History: Creating an Equiverse	Kathy Matsui shared inspirational anecdotes from her personal and professional journey, to highlight how she overcame challenges as well as to provide advice to other women.
SESSION 7 - Reframing Public Policy: Making Equity the Norm	The panel delved into various aspects of creating gender targeted policy measures to enable women to be engaged in the workforce and for ensuring that Governments devise policies that are not “gender blind”.
SESSION 8 - Partnering of Equals: Shaping a better World	This session was a showcase of how equal partnerships can be built at home, if partners are supportive of each other’s ambitions and enable each other through challenging times.
SESSION 9 - Celebrating every Woman: Starting a Ripple	In this session the panellists discussed the key motivations (necessity vs opportunity based) that drive women to take up entrepreneurship as well as success factors that have enabled successful women entrepreneurs.
SESSION 10 - Closing Manifesto on Equiverse	This was the concluding session where the panellists presented a Manifesto of what the Equiverse would like and summarised the recommendations from the conference on steps that will be needed to get create an Equiverse.
Valedictory Session	Alyse Nelson stressed on the need to have bold leadership if we want to create an Equiverse, as has been shown by the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. Leaders will have to lead by example in demonstrating inclusivity, to have a ripple effect.

Speaker and Participants Profile

The event brought together 35+ speakers and panellists from diverse backgrounds including academicians and researchers, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs, senior leaders from Development and International organisations as well as leaders from Indian and International Non-Profit/Non-Government Organisations (Chart 1 & 2).

Chart 1 – Profile of Speakers

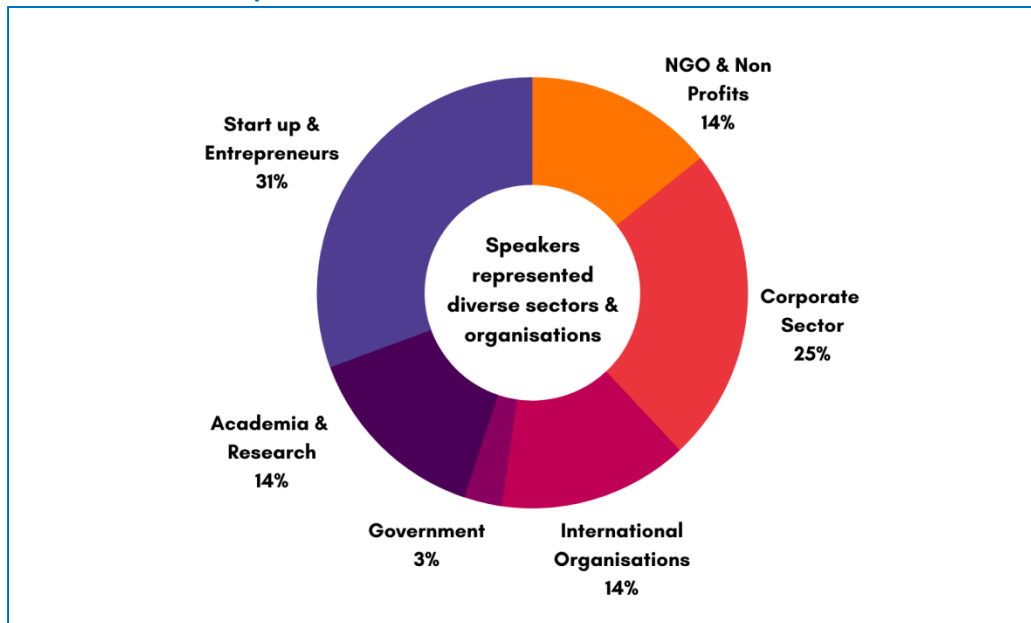
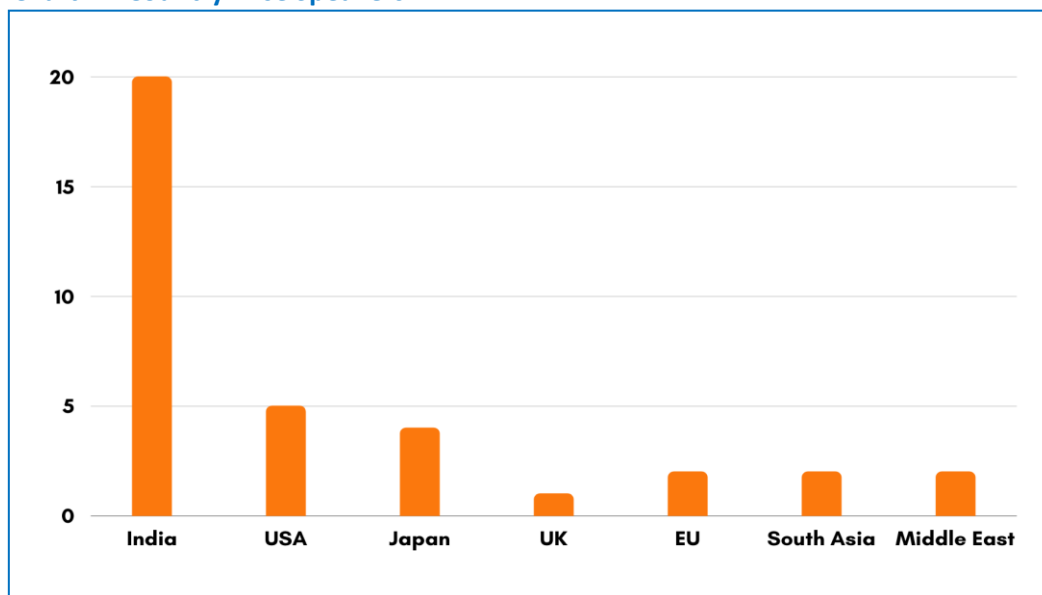


Chart 2—Country-wise Speakers



**As per currently held position and country of residence of the speakers; and not including their previous roles, responsibilities, and countries.*

The 800 plus participants at the conference also contained a diverse group of stakeholders, including senior leaders from the industry, Government, academia, and civil society. Around 95% of the participants were from India, while the rest were from 13 different countries.

II. Understanding the concept of Equiverse

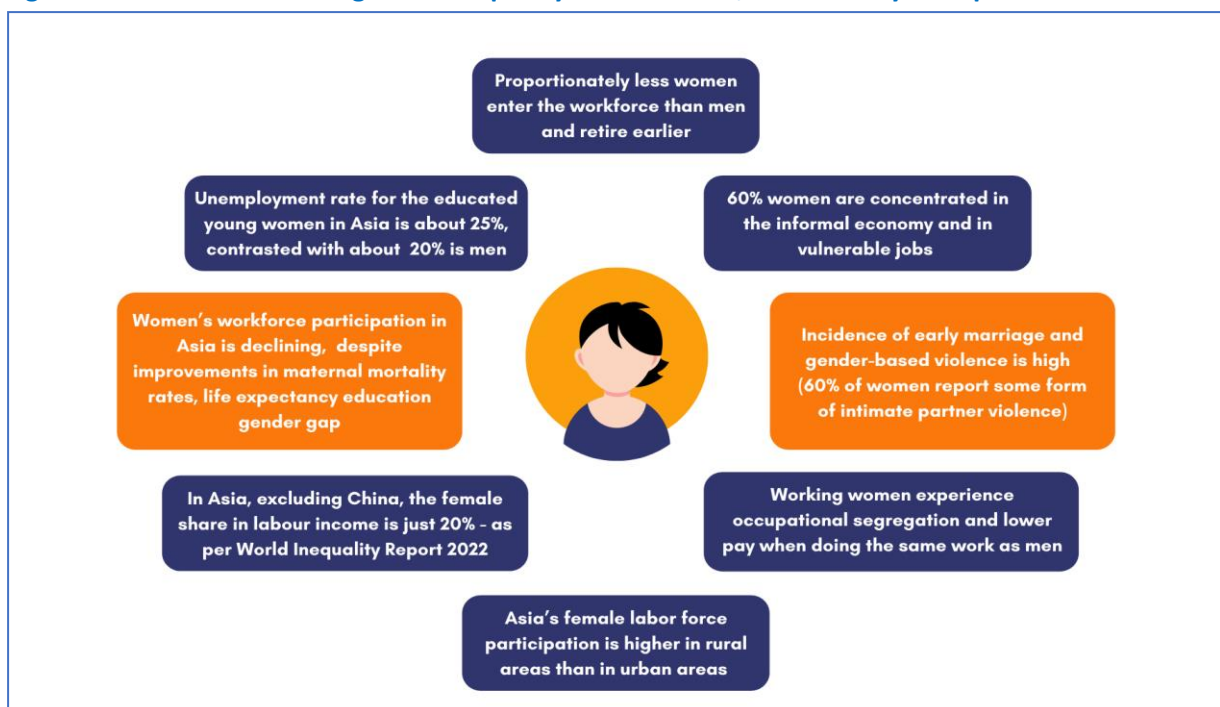
“I think there will be lot of things that will happen during this century that will shape the world to come but if you ask me, probably the character of the century will be defined by how much will we be able to achieve on the gender equality agenda”. –Rebeca Grynspan

Our quest for an “Equiverse” stems from the urgent need to address the slow progress towards achieving gender parity in the world, an issue which is at the core of both TalentNomics India and KAS’s work agenda. Globally, women continue to face barriers to their economic prosperity and face several forms of discrimination. Many speakers at the conference highlighted the World Economic Forum’s appalling statistical prediction that it could still take the world another 100 years to achieve gender equality – that’s an entire generation longer.

Speakers also highlighted statistics and anecdotes that’s how the huge and persistent gender gaps that reflect various facets of the inequality faced by women in all walks of life. They also discussed the different kinds of struggles women face in achieving their career, business, and professional aspirations. They all alluded to unfortunate realities where menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, motherhood, menopause, and many other aspects of women’s lives remain serious and real impediments to equality of opportunity and voice. It was acknowledged that women, in trying to fit themselves into rules and moulds created by men, continue struggling to meet their own specific needs, thereby paying a high price of losing out in the pursuit of their aspirations.

Figure 1 shows some statistical realities from Asia that were brought out during the Conference.

Figure 1 - Different facets of gender inequality visible in Asia, as shared by the Speakers



“The incremental rise in Indian women's education qualification is of greater magnitude than the rise in Indian men's education qualification. Therefore, as per my research, if in 2010 Indian women in regular salary jobs had been paid like men in regular salary jobs, the wage gap in regular salary jobs would have been the opposite! This means that average Indian female wages would have been higher than average Indian male wages.”- Ashwini Deshpande

It was noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing inequalities and gender gaps. Negative gender effects of the pandemic are being seen in women's falling employment patterns and increases in their unpaid household work; rise in domestic violence and rise in number of girls being pushed out of school. For instance, it was highlighted out that there could be 13 million fewer women in employment in 2021 compared to 2019 (ILO estimate), while men's employment will have recovered to 2019 levels. 11 million girls may not ever return to school globally, because of the pandemic (UNESCO estimate). It was, therefore, acknowledged that this just further highlights that whenever the crises strike, women are disproportionately harmed – whether it is an economic calamity or war and conflict or devastation caused by climate change.

However, women's economic recognition is critical to economic growth and prosperity. Empowering women, through improved education, health care, earning opportunity, political rights, is not just a moral imperative but it's also economic imperative because having more women participating in the workforce leads to increase in national incomes of countries, as corroborated by various statistical estimates by IMF, World Bank and McKinsey. But what is also evident is that achieving gender parity will also have a huge impact on creating a more sustainable world.

“Social trends within ESG (environmental social and governance) strategy are seeing even more focus on equity, equality, distribution of power, representations of the communities that the businesses serve. Societal norms are also changing slowly but they are changing in terms of women's options, rights, and rewards at work”. -Anisa Morridadi

Another fact that has become abundantly clear in the past two years is just how critical women's leadership is for resurrecting the world. Women are changing the way we think about power and leadership and are proving that local action drives global change. The pandemic has shown us that the world, led by men, is not set up to solve the challenges of tomorrow, which is why we need men and women side by side as leaders, both bringing unique skill differences in the way they lead.

*“Women are as good as men and you need both to complete a family, complete an enterprise.”
– Sanjay Kathuria*

Therefore, in the light of these realities, it is important to acknowledge gender equality as prosperity and a sustainability issue that needs to be urgently prioritised. We need to reaffirm our commitment to speeding up the achievement of this goal of creating an “Equiviverse”, and initiate actions urgently.

Our vision of an Equiverse

The gender-equal Equiverse that we aspire for, among other things, is one where -

- Being born as a male or female does not come with its guaranteed privileges or disadvantages
- The playing field is level and women have equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal rewards for equal work
- The Burden of providing for family is not entirely on the men
- Women leaders achieving success in various fields are not outliers but the norm

For the conference, TalentNomics teamed up with the Beatfreaks in the UK to survey several people across the world to understand how they would qualify an “Equiviverse”. This survey came out with several inspiring words that could synonymise an Equiverse, including comfortable, rejuvenating, safe, innovative, happiness, empowerment, respect, learning, organic, natural etc. Many of these words go beyond just the gender equality and gender equity and seem to form the prospect of a brilliant new world.

How do we build the Equiverse?

The idea of gender equality is not new but what is evident is that the progress towards this goal has been slow. Changes have been happening but in isolated pockets or at an intellectual level. What is, therefore, needed now are innovative, out of box ideas that can be implemented at scale.

“We seem to have fixed the women and fixed the organisations and we still don’t seem to have enough women when we need them, so clearly it’s not about either of these components, it’s about the eco-system where change need to happen”. – Vasanthi Srinivasan

For very long, gender parity has remained a women’s issue but now it is evident that each stakeholder in the ecosystem needs to play a role, whether it is Governments, the private sector, NGOs, men, women, and society at large. What is required is for everyone to be emotionally invested and must become a ripple of change. But most of all, we would need collaborative and coordinated actions among all stakeholders.

An important piece in this collaboration will be Technology, which presents many opportunities to impact the lives and livelihood of women globally. However, in today's world technology is gender blind and there are huge gender gaps in access to technology. Especially stark is the inequity towards women in rural areas, potentially even in semi urban areas. Unfortunately, while the pandemic led to a digital push, it also has increased the technology gender gap. But in the post-pandemic world, technology will be a great enabler for women if utilised effectively by all stakeholders.

Our Equiverse

by Jaspreet Kaur & Auden Allen

With a ripple of change, we can brighten our future.

When together we work, to create this wonderful Equiverse

Let's take a moment for us to immerse

In all the beautiful things that make us diverse

A collective force towards a change for the better

An Equiverse that shows us working together

As one, we overcome and move with a force of unity

In a liberated future, the world dances to the music made from our synchronicity

Interdependence surpasses control

A working circuit is perfect when each component works towards the unified goal.

With a ripple of change, we can brighten our future.

When together we work, to create this wonderful Equiverse

How do we differentiate and unpack?

The stereotypes that find themselves attached

To what a human can or can't do

Who would have knew?

That there could be so many labels attached to our gender

How can we reassess the agenda?

So that no one is left to feel submerged underwater

Let us all stand taller

Letting go of the labels and all their limitations

So that these waves can empower future generations

Start the ripple, spark the trickle

Together we can conquer our barriers and support each other

With our collective efforts,

we can move the mountains of stereotypes

And raise our minds beyond echo chambers

The beauty of our world exists through all of our efforts combined

With a ripple of change, we can brighten our future.

When together we work, to create this wonderful Equiverse

A world in which we are linked and not ranked

Where each of our contributions are celebrated and thanked

That no efforts go unappreciated

Where words become actions, and actions demonstrated

Where each and every voice is embraced and empowered

Amplifying our liberation so that it can bloom and flower

Our unique differences are a cause celebration

Bridging the gaps that have caused separation

Collective synchronisation is the key to this equation

Acknowledging our past oppression and moving towards liberation

Because we're tired of burning

Is the key to this Equiverse unlearning?

Is the key to this Equiverse some more smashing of ceilings?

And not just a mindset to fight but to find some collective healing

*Because we've been breathing - air that is filled with imbalance and neglect
But we're not too late for change to take effect
A volcanic eruption is full of fire and destruction
But when the lava cools, new soil is fertile and ready for
growth and construction
Building a new earth is about acknowledging resistance
And being consistent with realising we are all a part of this ecosystem
Empowerment comes from collective responsibility
Recognising our unique differences and intertwining them in unity
Just like the elements
Just like the earth, water, space, wind and fire
We all have a role in how we elevate and inspire*

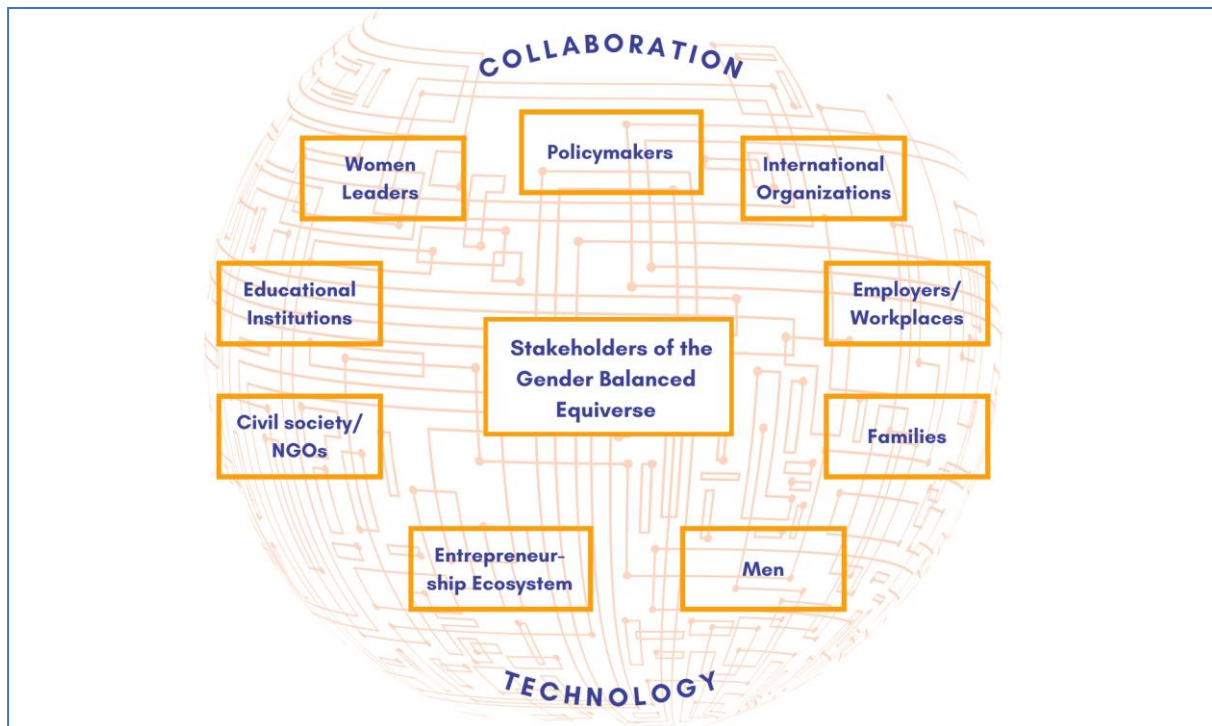
***With a ripple of change, we can brighten our future.
When together we work, to create this wonderful Equiverse***
*Wherever you come from, wherever you're going
We are all branches, bark, leaves and fruits of one tree collectively growing
We are all words, working together to create this story
Symphonies of elements orchestrating our universe
When we interact and harmoniously converge grit and grace,
Transmute love from hate.*

***With a ripple of change, we can brighten our future.
When together we work, to create this wonderful Equiverse***

III. Role of Stakeholders in Creating an Equiverse

Figure 2 shows the different stakeholders in a woman’s ecosystem who bear the onus for taking actions needed to build the Equiverse. In the following sections, we summarise actionable suggestions for these stakeholders that emerged from the discussions at the Conference.

Figure 2 – Responsible Stakeholders for Building an Equiverse



III.1 Policy Makers

Government policies are the greatest enablers of social and economic change, and therefore, have the biggest chance of bringing about the mindset and on-ground changes needed to achieve gender equality. For example, as noted by Keynote speaker Kathy Matsui, *Japan’s 22-year-old Shenomics program for addressing the country’s economic gender gaps is far from achieving its objectives but has managed to change the conversations around diversity in the country and caught the attention of many people in the society. The reforms have moved the topic of diversity in this country from the realm of human rights or equality into the front and centre of the national growth agenda.*

However, the unfortunate reality is that most government policies globally have, to date, failed to bridge the gender gaps because they have essentially been “gender blind”. Therefore, with the objective effectively reframing public policies, the panellists at the conference explored gender targeted policy measures that can create significant opportunities for women to be engaged in the workforce and beyond. They showcased examples of policies and strategies that have succeeded in creating equity as well as those that have failed; thereby prescribing gender focused policy actions that can be taken in future to make equity the norm.

Discussions during the conference brought out following areas that the Government can focus on to make sure policymaking is not gender blind:

i. Ensure Gender Equality in Political Decision Making and Leadership

The panellists highlighted the need to have more women in policymaking, as more women in political leadership has a direct positive impact on the gender responsiveness of the Government's policies. In fact, more women in policymaking have shown to have significant benefits for the overall economy and society as a whole - Figure 3 summarises the key benefits of increasing women's participation in politics that were brought up by the panel. These benefits have been especially highlighted in the last couple of years that witnessed that women Heads of State in Countries like New Zealand, Finland, Iceland, and Germany had dealt with the impact of the Covid-19 crisis better than rest of the World.

“Japanese voters don't seem to be keen to increase the number of female MPs. So, this affects the parties' attitude to women's candidacy - parties might think that voters do not think of low levels of women's representation as a serious problem and are therefore, not interested in women's representation. It is a bad vicious circle.” – Mikiko Eto

Figure 3 – The need to have more women in policymaking and government



The reason for women leaders succeeding was attributed to unique leadership traits that they imbibe, which is defining a new model of leadership (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Traits that make women effective leaders



“Women leaders have shown to shift the dial in terms of the culture in political leadership and about expectations that voters have of leaders and about political policy.”- Annemarie Reerink

Women leaders, however, can bring about change more successfully when they are not completely on their own but are joined by women at all levels of government and in public life more broadly. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the process of getting more women into political positions at all levels. Following were some suggested actions for achieving this–

- **Quotas** – the example from India was quoted to demonstrate the effectiveness of quotas. Two decades ago, a quota was instituted around having one-third of politicians in the local governance institutions at Panchayat level as women. This has now resulted in nearly half of the elected representatives at this level being women.
- **Make parties and Parliaments more women friendly employers** – they must become flexible towards incorporating maternity and paternity and parental leaves.

“I was offered a very high position in government - as a Vice Minister of Finance when my child was 2 months old. When I said I can’t take it because I will be breastfeeding for at least 6 months, the President-to-be said we will wait for it. They were flexible enough to say we will wait for you. This is important because if he would have said “well we cannot wait for you”, I couldn’t have had the career that I had in politics”. -Rebeca Grynspar

- **Have more women in leadership** - Having a woman at the top provides an example to other women, that it's possible. And that gives inspiration to younger women to aspire towards a political career and over time, the number of women grows.

ii. Collect and analyse Gender disaggregated Data to guide policy actions

There is a need to generate sex disaggregated data, to ensure that policy changes are gender responsive, data driven, and evidence based. Better gender data will give a more complete statistical picture of the relative situation and status of women and men of diverse backgrounds, intersecting with issues like age, literacy, employment status, etc. Such data would provide solid evidence to understand women's requirements, how to vocalize them and how to meet them.

And this data must be used for ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments at the policy level. This can facilitate policymakers to think through the gender implications of a particular issue, differentiate manifestations of a problem from root causes and identify evidence of what has worked.

An example of gender assessments based on data

- Narrated by Annemarie Reerink

Bangladesh attracted more girls into the education system through increased recruitment of female teachers. And the resulting increases in girls' participation in education then contributed to reduction of early marriages for girls as well as falling fertility rates. This complemented interventions in Bangladesh on family planning and reproductive health.

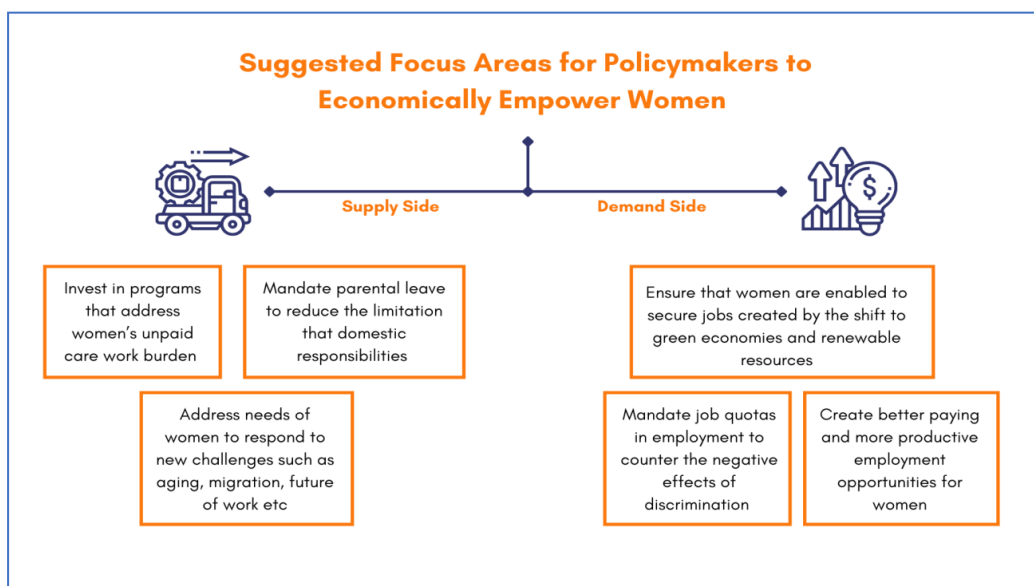
Analysis of data by the World Bank's noted that increased demand for women in the labour market, in particular for women with a basic level of education in the garment industry, was a key factor in stimulating girls' education. And the government of Bangladesh had responded accordingly with an increased supply of education services, because there was this demand from Bangladeshi families to educate girls now as well. It shows clearly that the shifts in the labour market and economic opportunities played a big role in changing parental attitudes, societal norms and cultural practices.

Such kind of gender assessments based on data, therefore, helped to uncover existing or predicted gender differentials, both around issues that policies need to respond to as well as around how any given policy proposal may impact differently on women and men from specific population groups.

iii. Focus on women's economic empowerment

Governments need to focus on creating quality jobs and high value-added entrepreneurship opportunities for women. They must focus not only on enabling women's supply but also demand for their labour that appears to have been dwindling over the years. Figure 5 shows some suggested actions that governments can take.

Figure 5 – Recommended actions for Governments to implement



“It is not supply-side factors alone which are responsible for the declining female labour force participation rate but there are also demand side factors – this essentially means that there are actually not enough suitable productive employment opportunities for women being created, as a result of which women are not dropping out of the workforce but they are, in fact, being pushed out of the workforce.” –Radhicka Kapoor

In addition, it was emphasised that governments must focus not just on increasing the proportion of women in the workforce but also in leadership positions. For instance, one of the reasons attributed for the failure Japan’s Shenyomics reforms is that while the proportion of women in labour force increased from 55% to 71%, a lot of these women are still working as in part-time roles. There is still a dearth of women in Japan’s leadership making roles, as women make up less than 15% of the leaders in private companies and just 10% in the parliament.

iv. Focus on women’s skill development

While the gender gaps in education have significantly decreased in recent years, women remain deficient in professional skills required to enable them to qualify for jobs. Therefore, it was suggested that instead of focusing too much on the supply side of education, governments must also focus on matching women’s skills to the demand for employment. This would entail focusing on additional employability skills and vocational training for women.

Example of an effective skill development program

- Narrated by Prabhjot Khan

Kerala’s additional skill acquisition program in post-basic education provides opportunity for the students to learn English communication skills, basic IT skills, soft skills and in demand vocational courses - outside the regular hours and during the vacations. This equips young men and women to go out in the market and be employable. By incorporating different needs of aspirations of men and women in career counselling and training module, this program promotes gender parity in the workforce participation.

v. Subsidise technological innovations that benefit women

Governments across countries should collaborate to promote innovative products designed to address women’s specific requirements. They need to come together to democratise innovation, enable the ecosystem to flourish and yet ensure that the products are affordable so that they are not restricted to the top few of the world only. So, they can think of subsidising products that benefit women’s health and productivity, such as menstrual cups, Femtech products assisting in fertility and childrearing etc.

III.2 International Organisations

Many international and regional organizations like the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank etc. have made gender parity a priority in their policy advice to governments across the world. During the Conference discussions, we heard several anecdotes and examples of the work these organisations have been doing. Following are some ways in which International Organisations are addressing the gender issue in their work –

i. Practice Gender Mainstreaming and making all policies gender responsive

Financial institutions must facilitate mainstreaming of the gender aspect into all sector-specific policies. They need to help Governments be mindful of the differentiated impact that many of the policies measures or political decisions have on trade, investment, science, and technology have, in terms of leading to a more unequal or equal world.

For instance, ADB's program in the Kingdom of Cambodia on open, secondary education sector development has a commitment for a gender mainstreaming strategic plan in education. This program looks at different aspects of gender analysis like gender responsive pedagogy and materials, making gender education free of gender bias, creating a gender responsive school environment, and undertaking professional development targeted to female staff.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has a COVID-19 response policy for their development assistance, which is called partnerships for recovery. This has a strong focus on gender equality and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, many of whom are women and girls.

"I think one of the things that I would like to do in UNCTAD is in-gendering trade, investments, science and technology in the digital economy, because the gaps in all these areas are so wide and UNCTAD is on the centre of this agenda in the economic field". - Rebeca Grynspar

ii. Make a strong commitment to gender equality

International Organisations have committed to the goal of gender equality, which reflects in their own strategic planning and long run agendas.

For example, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has more than 20 years of history of working on gender, since their policy on gender development came out in 1998. ADB's Strategy 2030, published in 2018, includes "Accelerating Progress on Gender Equality" as one of its seven operational priorities. This priority recognizes that gender equality is critical to realize the socio-economic development of the region. Within this Strategic 2030 operational priority, ADB identified five areas where they would work with the countries and the countries in turn would also need to work on. These include 1) women's economic empowerment 2) gender equality in human development 3) gender equality in decision making and leadership 4) women's food and nutritional security 5) protecting women from risks and shocks of climate change. This set of priorities identifies the breadth of prevailing gender issues in the Asia-Pacific region and the spectrum of issues that ADB would also work on with the governments.

iii. Address gender equality in their own decision making and leadership

Having more women in the leadership teams within the International Organizations has a strong impact upon the gender component of the work that they do with various stakeholders.

"We (ADB) had a lot of representation of women in project related consultations and representation, but we had to see how to move that to higher levels, how to scale these interventions to shift from consultation to meaningful participation of women to support public decision making". - Prabhjot Khan

III.3 Workplaces

Organisations, as employers, can take several proactive steps towards achieving equity and inclusion within the workforce. In the last decade, employers have taken several steps to make their workplaces conducive to women's employment and growth. Some of these have achieved success but there are several areas companies go wrong.

Following are some future action areas for workplaces that emerged during the discussions at the Conference—

i. Put in enablers throughout the talent lifecycles of women

Qualitative and quantitative measurements are important throughout entire talent lifecycles. Organisations must create enablers for women to thrive and to ensure that they don't have a leaky pipe at any stage. Understanding women's aspirations and providing them opportunities, encouragement and enablement are all dimensions that employers must work on.

A variety of initiatives to help women professionals thrive should be initiated. Organizations should provide stepping stones for career advancement for women at different levels, cater policies for different needs of women depending on what stage of career they are in. These could include training programs for women to overcome specific challenges, unconscious bias training to create inclusive leadership, POSH trainings, policies for returning women, etc. Younger women should have sponsors who have their back when they are not available to speak up for themselves.

ii. Intentionally hire women to build the pipeline

Organisations can take conscious steps to hire more women into the organisation at various levels. Some of the steps that were discussed include:

- **Source more female resumes and candidates** – In general, female resumes for a job posting tend to be lesser, but the organisation must not just accept it as the norm. More male resumes come in because they are more in the market, and it may be harder to get more female resumes. But organisations need to keep searching and pushing, by providing search firms' time and space, having patience, relooking at job descriptions to make them attractive for women, etc.

“Another very interesting thing that we have done is that at the leadership level we talk about this concept called “two in the pool”. We ensure that you have at least two women shortlisted from a pool of qualified candidates to get beyond tokenism and for there to be a statistical chance of them getting picked”. –Aashish Kasad

- **Address the biases of Leaders** – Leaders must get all stereotypes and bias out of their minds and demonstrate consistency in hiring and promotion practices. Once they do that, it will encourage managers at the next levels to ensure the same. To address the biases people at the leadership level may have, organisations can encourage or even mandate them to undergo specific “bias neutralization” programmes.
- **Provide Return to work support**– In order to encourage more women to apply after career breaks, organisations could have dedicated programs for women returning to work, that create unbiased and fast-track career paths within the organisation.

For example, EY has an initiative “Back in the Game”, which means within 5 years of leaving the organisation, women wanting to re-join back EY as an alumina are welcomed back at their old position without any interview in the same team that they left.

- **Provide support for returning from maternity breaks** – Organisations can have formal interventions to help women who have gone on a maternity leave, like giving them transition coaches to help them come back quickly into the game and back into their roles to perform at the levels they were doing well at.
- **Intentionally hire women in non-stereotypical roles** - A number of roles in some industries have traditionally been restricted as the forte of men only. But organisations must overcome stereotypical mindsets and remove gender restrictions from all roles. Initially, they may need

to take proactive steps to hire women in such roles and pay attention to creating an enabling environment for women to come in and be successful. The organisations themselves can reap several advantages by opening such roles for both men and women.

Example of Benefits of Non-Stereotypical Hiring: Case of the Mining industry

- Discussed by Nadia Younes

In the area of mining security, her organisation ran a pilot and tested bringing in women security guards and they recruited women who had earlier received police training but did not end up being recruited as policewomen. When they hired them for the mines, they also brought their family members in to talk to them about the environment and how it would be safe for those women, since there were some concerns about how women taking roles like this would impact the family and the community. Once the organisation hired these women, they witnessed incidents of security breaches going down, as men and women together were catching far more security breaches than the all-male team earlier. Since the women were very well trained, they also raised the competency level of the now gender balanced team. Another thing that happened was that women from all over the area were trying to find the work in this company rather than the company trying to desperately find the talent.

The same thing happened for the ground shift workers when the company introduced part time work. When women came in to work part time, the mine's productivity went up, their recruitment level went up and the safety incidents went down.

iii. Measure the right parameters

A lot of organisations only measure representation and numbers to evaluate the success of their DEI initiatives. However, the panellists agreed that it is not just about representation and “not like a mandate to take the numbers up from say 15% to 30%” - that’s just one small step towards the goal. Organisations should also measure the overall business impact that the increased numbers will have and understand what those numbers mean to them in the long term. But more importantly, the diversity and inclusion efforts must look at different dimensions, including women’s aspirations, providing opportunities, encouragement, and enablement.

“We talk about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a journey; but how come other culture-change journeys within organisations are on a fast train but the gender equity and equality are still on a bamboo bicycle? I don’t accept that it has to be slow, so I want to get off the bicycle and get on the fast train, which involves measuring, holding people accountable and being transparent”.

-Nadia Younes

iv. Make it a core business agenda

Enabling women and achieving workforce diversity should not just be the job of the HR or DEI departments but should be a part of the core Business agenda and the Board’s mandate. It is very important for the organisation to view diversity as the key to innovation and growth, and to use this economic rational in the business context to convince all stakeholders to work towards achieving the goal.

Example of an Effective DEI strategy – The Case of Ernst and Young

- Narrated by Aashish Kasad

At EY, it is a very high priority of our vision 2020 and a part of our overall business strategy. As a result, it is percolating down in the tone of every webcast of our global CEO who is a great proponent of DEI. Structurally, we have formed what we call A Global Diversity and Inclusion Committee, that has across the world got several partners across multiple dimensions of the business, from different regions and functions to come together and think about ways to bring about D&I in the way we do business day and day out. We also have a lot of initiatives that we have across the board like equitable sponsorship to ensure visibility and advancement of people, to ensure that they get the right opportunity in assignments and can learn and contribute to different engagements that we work on for our clients. We have developed some global sponsorship initiatives like the Board of Director's tool kit, which can be leveraged at the region service line and at the accounts level. Even from a bottom-up perspective, we have networks so we can listen in and then bring those changes up to the leadership and ensure that it gets engraved into the system.

v. Leaders need to be personally invested

Leaders need to share stories of the ways in which bringing women into the workforce proved good for their business. More and more business heads and male leaders should be telling such stories as these stories can be extremely successful if sold as a narrative to bring into the workforce. When line leaders share such stories with other line leaders, it is far more influential than leaving it to be a HR programme or process only.

Leaders can also play a role by taking on and visibly demonstrating personal sponsorship to the D&I and leadership programmes for women that is initiated by their organisations. They can do so by taking these programmes as priority and reaching out to women and saying, "You need to do that, this makes sense for you". Without this, these programs become a tick in the box exercise and just remain as one more programmes that are running.

"I think the way to accelerate this is to make this all pervasive. Why should this happen just from a group of people? I think the best way to spread a culture is for everybody to take responsibility for that, so find a way of making it pervasive. If you do that, then change will happen in 10 years and not 100 years". –Swapn Johri

vi. Provide Sponsorship

Studies from around the world show women are over-mentored and under-sponsored. Mentorship involves coaching a person on how to improve their performance, how to know the culture of the organisation etc. But sponsorship is what leaders in powerful positions say about you and your performance when you are not in the room, how they advocate for your development and advancement, how they encourage you to put yourself forward or even how they put you forward for assignments and new opportunities.

Some companies try to assign sponsors but that is not right as sponsorship is a nuance one has to earn from a person who knows your background and ability. Instead, organisations should ask leaders to assess who they talk about and put forward, who they network with. Very often male leaders have informal "old boy networks" that leads them to naturally sponsor men. So male leaders should be encouraged to have unorganised, informal meetings with women in the organisations as

well to enable them to more effectively sponsor women rather than having all that be contrived via programmes.

vii. Provide Flexibility

The pandemic has presented an opportunity towards providing work-from-home models of working, which should help organisations, attract more women to join and continue in their workforce. However, the “Great Resignation” trend has also shown that simply allowing work-from-home may not be sufficient to prevent women from quitting their work. What is now also imperative is to reset and recalibrate organisational mindsets to create more flexible work models where home, office or fixed working hours will not matter. This will encourage more women to take up work and consequently aspire more.

Technology can be used to help make work flexible, especially for women. The ability to have virtual discussions over Zoom or Teams or Google has enabled women to participate in discussions and conversations without having to physically be in an office in person. This significantly reduces the burden, the travel time, the stress, and everything related to that. So, the use of such digital modes of interaction and communication need to continue even as we move into the new normal where people would be in person and virtual at the same time and we will have to change the way we.

III.4 Women Entrepreneur’s Ecosystem

While women’s entrepreneurship has received significant attention in recent times, still less than 13% of enterprises in India are women owned. Even within this segment of women owned enterprises, 80% of them have only one worker and less than 0.75% have five to six workers. However, it is vital to promote women’s entrepreneurship as it has positive spill over for the economy. Evidence shows that female owned enterprise tends to employ a greater share of women employees. So, women entrepreneurs can be job creators for women.

The real challenge, therefore, is not just to enable more women to take up entrepreneurship but also to figure out how to push women into the medium and large industrial sector. They need an enabling environment which must go much beyond what has been done till now.

Following are some suggestions and best practices for this that emerged from the panel discussions–

i. Understand the unique challenges of different kinds of women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs are a heterogeneous group, who come from different backgrounds, have differing motivations to establish their business, and have varying sets of challenges as well as enablers. It is, therefore, important to understand their unique needs in order to provide them with targeted solutions.

WE Hub, for example, is a Telangana Government initiative started out in 2018. It was created as an aggregator to enable and amplify the efforts to enable women entrepreneurs done by various organizations. WE Hub buckets women entrepreneurs as per their different challenges and needs. The model divides the entrepreneurs into 4 buckets – 1) self-employment and enterprise creation (first time entrepreneurs 2) pre-incubation for aspiring women entrepreneurs whose businesses are doing well and need to scale 3) micro-entrepreneurs for women whose business are succeeding as micro enterprises and can be accelerated 4) urban and tech entrepreneurship. The solution designed for each bucket targets the specific needs of women in that bucket.

ii. Focus on financial enablement of women entrepreneurs

Capital constraints are a significant barrier preventing women's entrepreneurs. Financially enabling them would include making both public and private sector funds available and accessible to women entrepreneurs. Following are some actions that were suggested by the panel in this direction –

Make women bankable –

“The Bangladesh Bank makes it mandatory for all the commercial banks to give at least 10% of their loans to women. But every year the percentage of disbursement is not more than 2-3%. So, the first thing that the government should be doing is to create clearly visible data on how many women actually need loans because access to finance is extremely tough in Bangladesh. All Banks want collateral but aspiring female entrepreneurs are unable to provide that because there is no one to vouch for them.” – Rubana Huq

While several bank loans and funding schemes are available for women entrepreneurs, what is needed is to build awareness about the process of acquiring those as well as to make the process simpler for women to apply. Also, because women rarely have access to assets to provide as collateral, they must be made more bankable by facilitating credit linkages to credit free loans.

“WE Hub, Telangana has facilitated more than 56.8 crore rupees without collateral for women. They essentially help making the loan process simpler and formalise it so that more and more women can apply. They also create awareness in women about property rights and collateral, ensure that they are given digital skills, that they understand the project reports that has been given to a bank etc.”- Deepthi Ravula

Ensure more women entrepreneurs are equally funded by private capital—Venture capitalists, Private Equity firms as well as other financial institutions will need to take proactive steps to address the gender gap in their capital and funding disbursements.

Example of Initiatives to Make Investors Mindful of Gender Balance in Investments

- Narrated by Amu Hepburn

The Investor Leadership Network has an Exclusive Finance Initiative that is aimed at aligning their membership and influencing the industry to create more equitable and diverse financial institutions as well as financial flows. This basically looks at what the network's 14 members are doing to advance diversity within their organisation and through their investments as well as understand what pain points they are trying to address. The goal is to get the essence of where the networks US\$ 9 trillion assets are invested, how the members view the industry and the areas where they can improve. The initiative's second phase is applying an inclusion lens to make sure that representation is integrated into decision making and truly influencing their investment decisions and their portfolio. Then the third phase will be to develop a toolkit to engage with the portfolio companies on how to apply all their learning and knowledge that the ILN represents to further the industry in a positive fashion.

Collect Data on gender gap in disbursements of funds – Gender disaggregated data on capital disbursements is one of the biggest challenges and financial organisations must try to work out how to collect that data, what are the gaps in data, what are the challenges of data collection and how they, as investors, can try to address that.

Help Women pitch better to investors - Women investors need to get smart while pitching their ideas for women-targeted products to investors, the majority of whom are men. Most often the investors don't buy into an idea because they haven't experienced the problem, which is why it is important to get them to imagine or relate to it as best as possible and substantiate the opportunity with data.

“We pitched to potential investors a product designed to understand menopause symptoms in women. We told them that one-third women in Japan are, in fact, not taking promotions because of menopause. So, the investors saw that if there is a tangible product that decreases the symptoms, then there might a big financial potential for them to invest in.” - Amina Sugimoto

Encourage creation of funds that specifically support women – Dedicated funding initiatives that provide capital and grants only to women go a long way in filling up the wide funding gender gap.

Vital Voices is global Non-Profit that partners with women leaders who are taking on the world's greatest challenges. We invest in women who have a daring vision, to bring about positive change to their communities - leaders who advance creative solutions to the world's most urgent challenges ranging from climate change to racial justice, economics and equities, gender-based violence and beyond. We are not venture capitalists but catalysts for investing in and amplifying women leaders. We invest in their vision, we expand their skills, we amplify their voices, and we connect them to a powerful network of peers. We also offer grants to further the mission that women leaders have. - Alyse Nelson

iii. Help women build networks and connections

Female networks and female friendships outside of family and kinship is an important component of enabling women to take on entrepreneurship. There is a need to create opportunities and platforms for networking that will allow women the opportunity to discuss technology, knowhow, constraints etc. as well as take actions, support, and advise other women. Community led and social initiatives in this area can work well.

“Good Market is a network and a community for women to market their products. If women want to launch a new product or service, they can come to good market because we have a good consumer base and a good network that even includes big multinational companies. With these things we try to encourage even the bigger companies to think about how they can create more opportunities for women. We also go back to villages and talk with different women's groups, even when they are doing small businesses, on how they can scale up their business to a next level. Within groups, we even form some child-care facilities so that they can put their children and go back to work.” – Achala Samaradivakara

iv. Enable women entrepreneurs with marketing support and skilling

Majority of the women led businesses are either individuals or very small-scale enterprises that face challenges in generating demand for their products. Therefore, it is important to enable them to create and continuously keep generating demand for the products and services. This requires providing them support with creating more marketing opportunities. Also, they need to acquire business skills, marketing skills (including things like how to click the best product pictures), pricing support, technical skills and basic digital literacy, inventory, and supply management etc. The different players in the ecosystem, therefore, could consider forming smaller teams to enable this.

v. Other support areas for women entrepreneurs

Following are some other steps that were suggested for enabling women entrepreneurs -

- Encourage larger companies to buy from female owned enterprises.
- Support women entrepreneurs to undertake the risks of structured experimentation and changing product designs for better market fit, when needed.
- Provide women with access to mentors or business coaches.
- Support women led businesses with team building.
- Help women negotiate profitable deals related to transportation, infrastructure etc.

vi. Use technology to promote women's entrepreneurship

Despite its adverse impacts, the Covid-19 pandemic has also provided a huge opportunity to leverage technology and to use technology as an equalizer for the next generations. Following are some areas where technology can be leveraged for enabling women entrepreneurs –

- **E-commerce** - E-commerce has been a great enabler for women entrepreneurs by providing them a channel to reach consumers that was otherwise a challenge.

For example, when the pandemic hit, many women entrepreneurs started producing millions of masks a day by switching from their existing production capacities. However, access to market distributing these masks was a critical component that was bridged with technology enabled e-commerce platforms.

- **AI and ML** - Big data and AI can be leveraged to build enabling technology for women. But this requires addressing the biases in data collection that is used as inputs in the algorithms behind the technological innovations.
- **Femtech** - Femtech refers to technology innovations that address women's health and wellbeing. There is a prediction that globally by 2027, the Femtech market would one trillion in size. Both investors and policymakers need to look at the potential of this segment and help these products reach women at scale and at affordable prices.

"I think the key challenge is to make technology a great equaliser and not become a tool which divides or brings or enhances the inequity or hampering women's opportunities to contribute to the labour workforce, to attain new skills or to access information." –Suhel Bidani

III.5 Education Ecosystem

Despite significant progress achieved in bridging education gender gaps, many challenges remain to educate girls. Girls born in villages and in poor households especially face several barriers to getting education. Firstly, they have to face a discriminatory attitude at home by parents, as girls are seen as an expense to a family when they are born. They have to deal with society's expectations like getting married after middle school and being pushed out of education even before college. Then there are additional hurdles such as violence in and around schools, the absence of sanitation facilities, insufficient learning outcomes and disincentives through a scarcity of qualified female teachers. And all these factors combine to result in a high proportion of out of school youth being girls and young women.

Another reality is that we live in a world where boys are taught to be competitive to win, come out on top each time no matter the cost, and never to surrender. On the contrary, way too many girls in

the world are taught to step aside, to be in the shadows, to not even dare stand-up and compete, and just to obey orders and do as they are told.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated these gaps and millions of girls now face being pulled out of education and pushed into marriages. While both boys and girls are suffering because of lockdowns, the ramifications for girls when they leave school early and thus end up having lesser learning outcomes are more severe. There are long term implications for the health and economic and social wellbeing for girls and their families.

An important piece in building the Equiverse, therefore, is to empower and enable young girls in coming generations.

“There are so many possibilities that we can together unleash, provided we give access to equal opportunities for all”. - Shilpa Ajwani

Following are some examples that were discussed regarding how families and schools can enable girls–

i. Help break gender stereotypes right at a young age

Right from a very young age, kids develop the stereotypes of what girls and boys can do, because they get it from their ecosystem from people around them.

“A lot of times in our classroom, the boys got very excited when we talked about superheroes. But girls become quiet because girls were not getting exposed to girl superheroes.”

– **Saurabh Aggarwal**

ii. Make boys more sensitive

Boys must be made to understand the issues girls face, so that they can be an equal partner in terms of supporting and creating a supportive ecosystem for everyone.

iii. Provide girls with better digital access

It has been noticed that, in poorer households, the mobile phones are usually given to the boys to learn something and not to the girls. The lack of access to digital technology especially posed a significant barrier to girls’ ability to continue receiving education when physical schools were closed due to Covid.

“I would never ever discount how much education can change a person’s life”– Pavithra Govinda Raj who studied at Shanti Bhavan, which is a school for impoverished and marginalized children. It provides girls and boys a top-class education and a level playing field without any sort of discrimination. Girls are encouraged to take up science subjects and aspire to become whatever they want. Apart from enabling them, the support system and protection at the school helps girls know what they want in life, aspire for their dreams, prevents them from early marriage by giving them courage to say ‘no’ to family and societal pressures.

III.6 Men and Family Members

Apart from professional enablement, women also require their home and family to be supportive and empowering, right from their parents to their spouses and in laws.

Following are some anecdotes and suggestions that were shared by speakers and panellists for creating an enabling environment at home –

i. Parents must provide girls in an empowering environment

One's family, household and environment determine what one's aspirations are and the choices one makes in life. Therefore, women's lives can only be changed if their parents have liberal mindsets and do not bring up their girls in patriarchal ways of living.

"We were three girls at home and my father was a man of his time-my mother stayed at home with her family to do all the housework. But at the end, he and my mother were able to infuse in us the sense that we could do whatever we dreamt of. I never felt as a kid that I couldn't to do something; that as a girl, I was not able to perform, fight, compete or allow myself to go higher in whatever I wanted to do." – **Rebeca Grynspan**

"My mother wanted a better life for me though it broke her heart to send me away to a school far from her at the age of 4." - **Pavithra Govinda Raj**

ii. Men and women should create equal partnerships after marriage

For women to thrive in their professional lives, it is essential for them to have enabling support in their personal lives. This requires building the right mindsets in men and women as well as creating the support structures to enable an equal partnership at home. Following are some characteristics of the right partner that were discussed at the conference-

- Someone who makes a woman feel stronger.
- Someone who is enabling for her career and helps her overcome her own mindset barriers.
- Someone who can support and stand up for her in front of his parents and society at large.

"I think marriage is not a milestone to engage with, after you've reached a certain thing in your career. Marriage, if it is to the right person, helps you grow. So, no matter at what point you make that decision, you just have to make sure that you're engaging with the right person, because it has to help you move forward." – **Neelam Pol**

Following were some suggested actions for building an equal partnership at home -

- Both should build their own independent ecosystems and support systems. Even the women should have their own friends and acquaintances that they talk to, socialise with, and depend upon for support.
- Both partners should create time and space to follow their own interests and hobbies independent of their spouses.
- Despite challenging situations, both must be on the same page and continue growing together and moving forward as individuals and in their careers.
- Both should be receptive to mutually deciding to make the requisite changes and sacrifices for the other, like for instance when its decision on moving cities for the other persons job requirement.
- Couples should take time out to openly discuss where they are and where they want to be in careers and life, and what they would aspire to do if there were no limitations. With that understanding, they should together work towards making their goals possible.

"When we talk about equal partners, and especially in a relationship, I don't know who's going to really be the judge as to who's equal and not equal, and who's above or less. But at the end of the day, it has to work for adding value to each other". – **Uma Reddy**

III.7 Individual Women

“What I know, at least over the years from what I have learned, it’s not just about facilitating and making things available for women. It has to work from the other end also - there are things that women also should be doing differently towards moving this”. – Archana Hingorani

During the conference, several pieces of advice emerged for women to overcome limiting mindsets as well as to support other women.

Following are some suggested actions that women themselves must take to move the world towards an Equiverse-

i. Choose their own happiness over the desire be superwomen

Women must realise that while life is not lenient and there are several setbacks, but they need to make decisions based on what they feel is right and what makes them happy.

“I had very young children, so after two years of being in government I quit it because it was so crazy for me and so difficult to take all those tasks at the same time. I openly recognised that I cannot go on anymore because I cannot make everything work at the same time and I became a feminist at that moment. I realised that I had to let go of my syndrome of superwoman to be the best mother, to be the best worker, to be the best Vice-Minister - and try to do all that at the same time! I feel for the young women also today because I know that many of them continue to have that trade off in front of them.”- Rebeca Grynspan

My mother-in-law told me “Look after your happiness. If you become unhappy because you don’t do (what you want) and you don’t opt for that, just remember one thing that the unhappiness you are feeling, even if you don’t convey it in words, will automatically be transmitted to your children and to the rest of your family. Conversely, if you are happy with whatever you choose to do then that happiness will be transmitted to your family”. – Kathy Matsui

ii. Overcome self-doubt and bridge the confidence gap

Women tend to doubt themselves a lot. They often don’t grab opportunities, thinking they are not good enough. They have low confidence and are reluctant to count their accomplishments or ask for assignments, promotions or raise, unlike men who are normally more comfortable showcasing their achievements. And this lack of visibility becomes a challenge when they seek opportunities they deserve. For instance, since leaders and managers don’t hear from them and don’t know what their desires, skills and their visions are, they are unable to put them forward or vouch for their skills. Therefore, it is absolutely vital for women to develop self-confidence and enhance their visibility.

“I talk about it as a sticky floor that holds women back and the only one who can allow us to rise is ourselves. So, rather than worrying about the glass ceiling, I think we should get rid of the sticky floor, and then we will keep soaring.”- Namrita Jhangiani

“Women should treat talking about their achievements or their desires to senior people as educating them about what they want in their life and what they want out of their job and career.” - Kathy Matsui

iii. Build strong support systems around themselves

Without trying to solve all challenges on their own, it was advised that women need to build up strong support systems and personal support networks to advise and guide them in the personal and professional journeys.

“Women should form what they call personal BOD, a personal Board of Directors. This is comprised of people who know you holistically and who can tell you straight to your face what they feel about anything you are doing or saying or thinking, they are upfront and honest with you”.

– Kathy Matsui

iv. Be role models for other women

It is very important for women leaders and successful women professionals to pay it forward by showcasing themselves and their stories to inspire other women to follow in their footsteps.

“Women can create ripples for girls by showing them they can create and mould their future. They can inspire them to dream big”. – **Pavithra Govinda Raj**

“I realised that that we were not alone, that there were many women out there that were going through the same thing. I really reflect a lot about my experience and the need to help other women to be able to fulfil their dreams.” – **Rebeca Grynspan**

v. Push the diversity agenda in their organisations

Women should call out biases in their organisations related to diversity. For example, women leaders or women’s networks within organisations must propose changes and lobby to address biases such as recruiting only from certain communities or universities that are not diverse or it not having on-site day-care etc. Also, women must find likeminded people to join them in lobbying for a change, and this should especially include male champions who can be brought into the conversation to propose possible solutions.

IV. Collaboration between Stakeholders: The key to Success

“Cross sectional collaboration is the key to progress. I think more collaboration and much less competition is how we are going to achieve our goals. If we are truly going to achieve a gender equitable society, there has to be equal partnership. There is no other way. There is enough to be done and is truly not for the one sector to solve on its own.” - **Amy Hepburn**

Ecosystem players need to collaborate with each other and take joint actions to support and enable women. Disaggregated and uncoordinated actions have tended to create minimal or no impact on the lives of women. Collaborative actions, on the other hand, can create effective solutions at scale. Such collaboration is especially needed by the social sector NGOs and Government, whose initiatives often need the support of the private sector as well as of International Organisations and Development institutions.

However, collaboration is often difficult to execute. There are some barriers to collaboration that were identified by different stakeholders, when building cross-sectoral partnerships-

- Private sector and social sector are often not on same wavelength and don’t speak the same language, as they both may have differing ideologies and incentives. There is need for a lot of patience from both the sides to understand how the other side works and need to put themselves in the shoes of their counterparts. For example, the need to balance between livelihood and the market by not cutting down wages to reduce prices but being competitive in the mainstream.
- Collaboration is built on relationships and educating the other side, which gets affected when there are frequent personnel level changes as in the public sector.

But despite challenges, organisations are driven and incentivised to initiate collaborations when -

- There is a desire to share their knowledge and resources.

For example, CDPQ has done very innovative things for the financial institutions, like being one of the first to set out targets for within ourselves for diversity and equity and inclusion. However, we did not stop at that but thought about how to get a lot more of likeminded institutions to come together. – Anita George

- The leadership of the organisation initiates collaboration and invests in it.
- There is someone who truly believes that power of the collective is much greater than the power of the one individual.

Following are some examples of successful collaboration between the Government, private sector, social sector, and financial institutions; that were discussed during the conference -

Collaboration between NGOs, financial institutions, and private sector

Reema Nanavaty gave two examples of how SEWA built collaborations to get support for poor women, who alone cannot go to scale. It is the partnerships that equip and enable women to build their economic enterprises or strengthen and enable them to go to scale. Therefore, SEWA always looks for partnerships to bring the women into the mainstream, to transfer and learn the knowledge of the system and processes, to find relevant market place etc.

SEWA organised 35000 saltpan women workers in Rann of Kutch in the desert of Gujarat that produces 70% of India's total salt requirement. These workers were working as bonded labourers only because almost 75% of their income was going into purchasing diesel oil to run their pumps and the challenge was to find alternatives so that these women saltpan workers can immediately increase incomes. That's where SEWA partnered with IFC and the Bank of Baroda (a public sector or a nationalised bank of the country) and worked out a whole financial architecture because these the poorest of the poor women workers have no collateral or guarantee. So, they brought in a private company where the CSR of the company fulfil the first guarantee and the 35000 women salt workers now have access to loans as a result of which they have been able to switch over from diesel operated pump set to solar pumps as this requires more than 10 times investment. Now in the offseason these women are setting up the first-ever women owned micro grid or the solar power so that the energy generated could feed the grid. As a result, they now have the net earning or income of 50-60 thousand rupees a month lifting them up out of poverty.

In this past two years when we were hit by the pandemic, all the work and livelihood opportunities came to a grinding halt. But to use the women who already had the skills, SEWA approached the government and started getting orders for making masks and PPE kits. As a result, some 400 women continuously got work and income in making the masks and the PPE kits. As SEWA partnered with the government, they got orders from the local government hospitals, from the local health centres and as well as private hospitals to whom the Government recommended SEWA.

“We partnered with WhatsApp and other online platform like Amazon and Flipkart to enable marketing of our rural fashion line that not only gives work to a few hundred, but we have five thousand young artisans who have been getting sustained work and income. As a result of the partnership, the artisans get support with things like curating photo shoots, making catalogues, doing market research etc.”-Reema Nanavaty

Collaboration of financial institutions/ organisations

Investor leadership network (ILN) is a collective of 14 institutional investors that creates capacity and peer to peer learning. These financial institutions have come together and agreed that they will focus on three of the most critical issues that are affecting our globe right now - climate change, diversity in investment, and sustainable infrastructure. They represent US\$9 trillion in assets under management, invested across continents and asset classes. By the power of this collaboration, they have brought together likeminded individuals and the peer learnings showing by example what can be done. Bringing together institutions with large pools of capital shows that capital could be deployed in a meaningful way, and this is what actually causes or starts a trend. If all come together to bring about change, that's when we see presentable and real change happening in terms of empowerment of women as well as all the people who need a louder voice in the ecosystem.

V. Call to action - Conclusion and Summary

*I didn't know that to be a woman is to be not she,
not free,
but something allowed by man; less than....
A part of HIS plan.
I do know, though, that to be a man there needs to be a SHE to give him birth,
to protect and feed him-be his goddess on earth!
So, this present universe
needs to be an Equiverse;
she a complement to he,
he a compliment to she
then the human race
will be in place,
free from "he rules she" and "she fights he",
the best of both, a "We."*

- Mrinalini Patwardhan Mehra

The pandemic, while it has exacerbated many of the long existing inequalities, has also created opportunities to build and escalate the dialogue around how we could reach that steady state universe where equity is the norm. It is now time to bring about a radical, fundamental, and global paradigm change, as a shift from a fiercely competitive and self-promotion mind-set to a compassionate and collaborative one.

What is evident is that we must take a multi-dimensional approach to addressing the gender issue, through changing culture, enforcing enabling policies and taking actions with inspirational leadership. We need to create more than enabling environments; get rid of barriers to education, mobility, access to finance, health; and make women part of decision-making bodies, in the Governments, leading organisations and financial institutions. We need to create allyship and partnerships with men. We also know that we have to amplify women's voices, thus making sure that women have visibility and build credibility for their important work.

But most of all, each one of us must become a Ripple Maker. Policy tools have proven insufficient, which is why we need more and louder voices; we need a global movement. Leaders, especially women leaders, must come forward and also become ripple creators by supporting other women and striving towards the sustainable world that we are talking about.

Actions for Building an Equiverse: Recommendations for Stakeholders in the Ecosystem

Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage more women in policymaking • Use gender-disaggregated data and ex-post gender impact assessments to guide all policy actions • Focus on economic empowerment of women by addressing their unpaid and childcare burden, mandating quotas, skilling and providing career services • Facilitate access to capital and resources for women entrepreneurs • Create better paying and more productive employment opportunities for women • Address health and wellbeing of women • Subsidise technological innovations that benefit women • Encourage public-private partnerships in initiatives that can empower women • Aggregate and amplify different initiatives aimed at enabling women entrepreneurs
International Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly commit to the gender equality agenda • Mainstream the gender aspect into all sector-specific policies • Address gender equality in their own decision making and leadership
Corporate sector/ organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make workplaces enabling for women - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Enable women employees throughout their talent lifecycle ○ Make hiring women intentional, take proactive steps to build pipeline of females in the workforce ○ Measure diversity not just by number of women but also by using other dimensions that indicate if women are thriving in the workplace or not ○ Make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion a core business agenda and a Board mandate ○ Enable Sponsorship of women, apart from providing mentoring and coaching ○ Provide a flexible work environment • Include women led businesses in their supply chains • Partner with NGOs, Govts. and International Organisations to undertake initiatives that empower women • Enable women to use e-commerce to access markets and consumers
Financial Institutions and Banks	<p>Banks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make process of applying for loans simpler and more accessible for women • Provide collateral free loans for women entrepreneurs <p>Financial Institutions, Venture Capitalists and Funding Organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the gender gap in capital and funding disbursements • Train women entrepreneurs to pitch their ideas to male investors • Create funds that specifically support women • Invest in Femtech and other innovations that benefit women
Men & Family members	<p>Men</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As husbands, help build equal and enabling partnerships with their spouses • As fathers, enable daughters to dream and achieve anything they want, without discriminating against them • As leaders, support and encourage women colleagues, push the diversity agenda, network with women, mentor and sponsor women and help change societal mindsets <p>Family members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents should invest equally in girls' education as in boys' as well as encourage girls to aspire, teach them to be assertive and avoid moulding them as per stereotype roles • In laws should be supportive of women's careers and their aspirations
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on changing their own mindsets, confidence gap and prioritise their happiness • Create support systems around themselves • Support and be role models to other women • Push the diversity agenda in their organisations • Enable daughters to live their dreams and not make sacrifices
Civil Society/ NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with other organisations in the development sector, with private sector organisations and the Government to address challenges that face women • Strive to understand the system and languages of different sectors to build meaningful long-term partnerships

Educational Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break gender stereotypes and provide the same education to both girls and boys • Actively promote women/girls superheroes/role models • Educate boys to be more sensitive towards girls issues • Provide equal and bias free education to girls and boys
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Following are some quotes by the Panellists of their vision and way forward for building an Equiverse-

“At the core of all our deliberations is that the equity or Equiverse is not just about equality in numbers or positions but equal representations for the greater good, for a better world and sustainable planet for future generations. This is urgent and a collective responsibility of men, women, government, private enterprises, institutions. And we don't have 100 years, our time really starts now.” - Radha Mukherji

“A lot of interventions have come now that will help drive this change. It is important to have these changes structurally embedded in the processes so that we can make an Equiverse”.
- **Aashish Kasad**

“I believe we can fast forward and leapfrog progress, if we work together, if we embrace a new model. These two years had difficulties, crises to breakthrough but gave us opportunities to create a new world, indeed, to create the Equiverse we are all striving for.” - Alyse Nelson

“I particularly think that, in this world of division and inequality, what I can do to make this universe more of an Equiverse is to give other people an equal opportunity for education, particularly women and girls. That to me is really, really something I hold deep and close to my heart. So, a lot of my philanthropic activities are in that arena.” - Kathy Matsui

“I think there is increasing recognition of the fact that social change cannot come from a single actor - individual actors playing their roles is now becoming very well recognised. In fact, it is possibly the most difficult thing to make happen, because the sustainable development goals had to add a goal 17 to focus exclusively on partnership and collaborations when that ought to be the building block of sustainable development goals.” - Vasanthi Srinivasan

“While we should seek to provide women a truly equal space, equal voice, equal right, and equal share of choice and equal share of responsibility, in doing so we must also provide an environment that not only respects but accommodates this “womenness” – in fact welcomes it and even celebrates it as a beautiful and phenomenal agent of a sustainable change for a better world. To me, only then we will be able to call it an Equiverse.” – Francois Bourgoin

So, one of the lessons I learnt is that an “Equiverse” was a collective struggle, that we needed to unite and to push for a better world together. – Rebeca Grynsan

“Women sort of fall back and don't lean in. But if women want equal careers and if they want to be part of Equiverse, then they also need to treat themselves like an Equiverse.”
– **Namrita Jhangiani**

Appendix I: Speakers Profile

Emcees:

Nikita Singla

Associate Director-BRIEF, Consultant-The World Bank

Aneesh Patnaik

Vice President, Vahura Talent Management

Introduction:

Ipsita Kathuria

Founder & CEO, TalentNomics India

Rabea Brauer

Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Japan

SESSION 1 - Keynote: HERStory made History: Creating an Equiverse

Rebeca Grynspan

Secretary General, UNCTAD, Former Vice President, Costa Rica

SESSION 2 - Future of Work: Turning the tide with Technology

Amina Sugimoto

CEO & co-founder, fermata

Nour Al Hassan

CEO, Tarjama, UAE-based Translation Agency

Suhel Bidani

Lead-Digital, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, India

Moderator: Anisa Morridadi

Founder & CEO, Beatfreaks

SESSION 3 - Restoring the Balance: Redefining new Matrix

Nadia Younes

Global Head, Employee Exp, Diversity & Wellbeing, Zurich Insurance Co. Ltd.

Swapn Johri

Corporate Vice President, Asia Pacific & Middle East, HCL Technologies

Namrita Jhangiani

Partner, Egon Zehnder

Aashish Kasad

Partner, EY LLP. National Leader-Chemical and Agriculture Sector, India D&I Leader

Moderator: Dr. Archana Hingorani

Founder, Siana Capital

SESSION 4 - Collaborating for Change: Together we Win

Amy Hepburn

CEO, Investor Leadership Network

Reema Nanavaty

Director, SEWA

Anita George

Dy. MD & Executive VP, CDPQ

Sayraben Baloch

Board Member, SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre

Deepthi Ravula

CEO, WE Hub (Govt. of Telangana Initiative)

Moderator: Prof. Vasanthi Srinivasan

Prof. OB & HRM, IIM Bangalore

SESSION 5 - Equal Opportunity - the Real Game Changer

Shilpa Ajwani

Founder & CEO, Unomantra and Former MD, Tupperware India

Pavithra Govinda Raj

Graduate engineer trainee, Mercedes Benz Research and Development India

SESSION 6 - Keynote: HERStory made History: Creating an Equiverse

Kathy Matsui

General Partner, MPower Partners, Former Vice-Chair Goldman Sachs, Japan

SESSION 7 - Reframing Public Policy: Making Equity the Norm

Mikiko Eto

Prof. Political Science, Emerita, Hosei University, Japan

Annemarie Reerink

Senior Gender Advisor, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, Govt. of Australia

Prabhjot Khan

Social Development Specialist (Gender and Development), Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Moderator: Rabea Brauer

Country Representative, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Japan

SESSION 8 - Partnering of Equals: Shaping a better World

Saurabh Aggarwal

Founder, Dabung Girl

Neelam Pol

Programme Specialist, UNICEF

Moderator: Uma Reddy

MD, Hitech Magnetics and Electronics P.L.

SESSION 9 - Celebrating every Woman: Starting a Ripple

Radhicka Kapoor

Senior Visiting Fellow, ICRIER

Ashwini Deshpande

Prof. Economics, Ashoka University

Rubana Huq

MD, Mohammadi Group, Past President, BGMEA

Achala Samaradivakara

Co-Founder and Managing Director, The Good Market

Moderator: Sanjay Kathuria

Fellow, Wilson Centre, and Senior Visiting Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

SESSION 10 - Closing Manifesto on Equiverse

Radha Mukherji

Founder & CEO, Shero Consulting

Francois Bourgoin

Founder, Managing & Creative Director, Graffiti wll

Ipsita Kathuria

Founder & CEO, TalentNomics India

Valedictory Session

Alyse Nelson

President & CEO, Vital Voices

Vote of Thanks

Binoo Wadhwa

Ex CPO, Yum! Brands and Sapient & Advisory Board Member, TalentNomics India

Appendix II: Conference Feedback

"It was an amazing programme".

"The TalentNomics conference is a much-awaited event every year. It's been instrumental in bringing about a shift in my own returning to work. This year's conference has brought in more clarity on the ways we can achieve the goal of equality in our society."

"A great event and must attend for everyone."

"It was a great session. And truly had a great time listening to the guest speakers who were so knowledgeable and experienced."

"Very resourceful information and the speakers were best".

"Well organised programme"

"Very nice informative session"

"Indeed, a great, insightful session"

"It was a great conference & would really initiate many more concrete steps towards women empowerment on a holistic level."

About TalentNomics India

TalentNomics India is a non-profit organisation and an affiliate of TalentNomics Inc, which is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt private operating foundation in the US.

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

To incubate future women leaders, our platform offers multifaceted learning and networking opportunities to women, provides support to leaders and guides organizations in their endeavour to build diverse teams. We leverage the best available global leadership talent to offer programs that deliver tangible outcomes.

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 show-case 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 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

- **Individual Level** - To build and grow Capable, Confident, Connected & Credible women leaders
- **Organization Level** - To create influential change agents in organizations to support and guide women in their journey
- **Global Level** - To develop a global network of organizations to reimagine women leadership talent collaboratively

Conference Team

Ipsita Kathuria
Tanika Marwah
Tazeen Parvez

Ina Wadhwa
Shravani Prakash

Disha Tripathy
Poonam Tyagi

Get in touch

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About 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 policy makers, economists, political analysts and thought leaders across Asia-Pacific to discuss emerging issues, propose policy alternatives and share best practices.

Conference Team

Rabea Brauer

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