

‘Bridging the Gender Gap: Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Decade’

A Symposium
by



**5th February 2024 | 9:15 am to 5:00 pm |
India International Centre, Multipurpose Hall, Kamala Devi
Complex, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi – 110003**

GLOSSARY

ASHA- Accredited Social Health Activist

CEQUIN- The Centre for Equity and Inclusion

CL- Casual Labour

CM- Chief Minister

CO- Chief Officer

CSOs- Civil Society Organisations

CSR- Corporate Social Responsibility

DV- Domestic Violence

FGDs- Focus Group Discussions

FLFPR- Female Labour Force Participation Rate

GBV- Gender-based Violence

ICRW- International Center for Research on Women

IWWAGE- Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality

JBT- Junior Basic Training

JKASW- Jammu Kashmir Association of Social Workers

LAMP- Legislative Assistants to Members of Parliament

LF- Labour Force

LFPR- Labour Force Participation Rate

MGNREGA- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

NGOs- Non-profit Organizations

OTT - Over-the-top

PLFS- Periodic Labour Force Survey

PoSH Act 2013- Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act 2013

PRIs- Panchayati Raj Institutions

PUE- Perceived Utility of Education

RWS- Regular Waged and Salaried workers

SC/ST- Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes

SHGs- Self-Help Groups

WCC - Women in Cinema Collective

WFPR -Work Force Participation Rate

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PRE-CONFERENCE NATIONAL PARTNER DIALOGUE

4 February, 2024

Leading up to the symposium, a gathering of CEQUIN's NGO partners from outside of Delhi was held. This group of like-minded associates were from across different states of India. Not only was it a good networking opportunity, but also an opportunity for cross learning and exchange of knowledge as all participants present worked in the field of gender equity, community development and sports for development. **It was the first step towards building a National Coalition of partners who could co-create national scale campaigns to implement gender transformative programs.** It was interesting to note that the strategies and tools used by each were so diverse, while simultaneously carrying a thread of commonality. Despite having undertaken very tiring and challenging journeys to make it to this pre-conference partner meeting as well as symposium, these outstation NGO partners were excited to be there. For instance, Khursheed Farash, Adolescent Programme Lead from the Jammu Kashmir Association of Social Workers mentioned that while he too was working in the space gender, he was intrigued by the idea of using football as a tool for women and girl empowerment, especially in more conservative communities in Kashmir and that he was looking forward to learning more from CEQUIN as well as other NGOs present, who were using sport as a tool of empowerment.

"I look forward to gaining a lot of information about diverse strategies. How can we bring people together for a cause. I have attended many meetings and conferences, but I see something concrete coming from this. Ideas and action points to take forward. I strongly believe there will be some solid outcomes and action after this conference." - Khursheed A. Farash, Jammu Kashmir Association of Social Workers (JKASW)

Naseem Khan, Programme Manager, The Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) led this meeting, warmly welcoming all participants, facilitating a round of introductions and encouraging them all to mingle with each other and enhance the vibrancy of the evening by contributing towards expanding each other's learnings through their own rich experiences in this field. Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, CEQUIN's Co-founder and Managing Director, seconded the warm welcome, sharing CEQUIN's desired outcome of this event and the symposium to follow.

"We have all been working in this same space for many years now and I strongly feel there is so much convergence in our work. So, let's not compete, let's collaborate and co-create. Let's come together and create a network of like-minded partners." - Lora K. Prabhu, Co-Founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN very eloquently summed up the intent of this pre-conference meeting as the “ **beginning of a beautiful journey of partnership and solidarity** ” as she thanked all partners for being a part of CEQUIN’s 15th year celebration of service in this sector.

This brief meet-up closed with a dinner for the delegates not only as an extension of CEQUIN’s hospitality but with a view towards providing a space for these outstation partners to mingle with CEQUIN staff, as well as each other, and build more fellowship leading up to the symposium. It was hoped that this would act as a precursor, opening the door to enriching conversations, sharing of learnings and strategies, and future collaborations among these participants, all working in the field of women’s empowerment.



THE SYMPOSIUM

Opening Plenary: Welcome and Introduction

Nida Ansari, CEQUIN's Communication and Partnerships Manager, and emcee for the day, extended a warm welcome to all participants (outstation as well as Delhi-based partners) for being a part of this milestone moment for CEQUIN, as they celebrate completing 15 years in the NGO sector, working in the field of creating gender equitable communities. She set the tone for a lively and dynamic day of information and knowledge sharing to follow.



Sara Abdullah Pilot mentioned that in this day and age of time crunches, virtual meetings and focus on efficiency, sometimes, it was equally important to take the time out to have physical gatherings like this. ***“ I don't know how exactly to explain it, but such gatherings create a 'raunak' [a lively and joyful vibe]. Zoom meetings etc. are all well and good, but these physical meetups are essential. Just look around at you all, the sense of energy in this room is so great...”***- Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN

She also mentioned that she was looking forward to a sense of energy and determination from all participants, throughout the symposium, and that sense of commitment to the cause, ***“I am determined to be here, and to listen and contribute, without assumptions and without presumptions.”*** CEQUIN was also very keen to encourage such an approach and lots of sharing of ideas and experiences which would undoubtedly lead to rich and valuable discussions, even beyond the symposium.

Ms. Pilot spoke about how CEQUIN had arrived at putting together this symposium and the intention behind it. Over the years, although CEQUIN has organized many conferences, usually they have been on particular topics in silos, for instance 'women, empowerment and sport' etc. However, at this 15th anniversary celebration, they wanted to address what was really missing in the current landscape of efforts towards gender equity and bring it to the forefront. Thus, making this event really matter, by not only focusing on **CREATING A SPACE OF HER OWN** for every woman or girl child, but **CREATING A SPACE FOR ALL PARTNERS** to come together and **have cross cutting conversations across the spectrum of gender.**

“When we only look at the space we are working in, we don't get that whole picture. If we are looking at achieving very deep, sustainable and transformative change, it'll only happen

when we start listening to each other. Only when we walk together are we actually going to make those strides.”- Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN

Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, warmly welcomed the chief guest, Padmapriya Janakiraman, introducing her as an award-winning Indian actress working in the film industry for 15 years and the founding member of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) that works towards creating equal space and opportunities for women in cinema. Her holistic understanding of women’s struggles at all levels and their need for a strong voice to represent them made Ms. Janakiraman's presence at this event a significant one. Padmapriya Janakiraman was indeed the perfect person to kickstart this symposium; Not only was she a strong voice in a male dominated industry like mainstream cinema, but also an extraordinary and brave person who had also taken up the cause of sexual harassment in the film industry on behalf of her fellow actresses with a strong sense of justice and solidarity, a very challenging stance to take.

CHIEF GUEST: Padmapriya Janakiraman, Actress and Co-founder, WCC



- **Congratulations CEQUIN:** Funding for NGOs and especially those working in the gender and women’s empowerment space has always been a challenge and therefore, it was truly impressive that CEQUIN has successfully worked in this sector for 15 years.

- **Actors have meaningful contributions to make:** Typically, actors are only called to attend so as “ ***to bring in that x-factor*** ” and rarely to contribute to these much-needed, serious conversations on gender issues. Thus, Ms.

Janakiraman felt very humbled to have her voice and opinions on gender and empowerment recognised and to have been asked to be a part of this space.

- **Gender in media is an important issue:** She also commended CEQUIN for introducing this topic of gender in media in the opening session, recognising that media and entertainment, which contributes 30,000 crores to the economy, is also a workplace and that the issues around it are important.

WCCs journey: The birth of WCC began in 2015, with the physical assault of an actress on her way to work. This attack had been orchestrated by a leading male film star. ***“...immediately 48 hours into this our colleague was victim shamed...’oh she was having an affair with him,’ ‘she deserved it’ etc.”*** However, this actress decided to take

the legal route and around 15-20 actresses, including Ms. Janakiraman, decided to gather around her and offer her the support she needed to be heard. Following on from this case, Padmapriya Janakiraman never looked back and went on to form WCC.

WCC's role in bringing change: Over the years, WCC worked hard, and there was some progress made in the media and entertainment industry. For instance, a marked reduction in victim shaming and public recognition of the fact that there are no victims of violence, just survivors. They also learnt that despite the loss of jobs and opportunities and constant judgment within the industry, it was still important to stand up and claim their rights. As a part of the Kerala film policy board Ms. Janakiraman oversaw the kind of subsidies and incentives that could be made to propagate inclusion of women in filmmaking. ***"There is always light at the end of the tunnel as long as you can wake up in the morning, see your face in the mirror and say confidently that, 'Okay, I have stood up not because I am trying to be brave but because it is my right to be able to work and do what I love doing."***

- **In the next decade, what should we, as a collective, be doing?** Having a public policy degree, working in the non-profit space and her own interest and research in women and entrepreneurship Ms. Janakiraman felt that there was ***"...a whole plethora of things that need to be done and we need to move the needle, inch by inch."*** Across the board, lack of access is and will continue to be a key issue both in terms of safety and a genuine platform whether in public or in the workspace. In terms of what should be done, from the perspective of women in cinema, there were four pegs to this:
 1. **Activism-** Gender equality has never been seen as a right for women in the media, because it has never really existed in the media space. It is openly out there that ***"...you are in this space because we are allowing you to be in this space."*** There is a severe dearth of film policies that are gender friendly. Awareness of this fact is so low that surprisingly even the non-profit sector is not talking about it. This needs to change. There is also a need to look at gender instruments that are there in other sectors and advocate for their replication in the film industry. There is also a clear need to push for the creation of counseling cells and other emotional support structures where women can just meet up and talk together, celebrating their joys and wins.
 2. **Research-** At present, there is zero research in the media and entertainment space regarding gender, women and empowerment. As the industry is not equipped or trained to do research, there is a need for support by and engagement of professional researchers in this space. The power of research is very important. It is a myth that women are not capable of making films successful in the box office because ***"[i]f a Shah***

Rukh Khan film can have a release both in the box office and the OTT [Over-the-top], then a Deepika Padukone film should also have that opportunity and there is a possibility, if we do enough pre-facto post-facto research.”

3. **Networks-** Bollywood is currently trying to replicate Hollywood and create networks of women who are coming together to see how best to share women’s stories as well as create more work for women in cinema. The way ahead is creating clubs which focus on making women’s stories and women filmmakers and championing them and creating more pitching opportunities for them in the marketplace. There have also been initiatives like 50/50¹, which the UK and other European countries are trying to emulate now. ***“ At the end, if they feel that they can invisibilise our voice by making us not get work I think one of the best ways to counteract that is by showing them that our stories matter. Storytelling is the way we change perspectives...we have an equal right to it and therefore our access to work is important. If you can’t give it, we will go and claim it ourselves.”***
4. **Outreach-** Kerala which has a very extensive film culture, supported by the government and WCC, started one of the only female film clubs meant to showcase films made by women for women. WCC is trying to see if they can replicate these networks of women in Bollywood through small women’s collectives. ***“ The steps are very small, not all of them make news. They are not meant to, because they are meant to change our lives and therefore make news.”***

Q&A Session: Open Plenary

- **Tara Krishnaswamy**: ***“...there are 2 angles to this, one is promoting women to make more films, to get a more equitable role in the film industry and get better funding etc., and the other is that mainstream cinema is being made through the male lens and controlled by men.”*** While there is a lot of feedback on films, it is devoid of women’s inputs. Because when a woman offers her critique, it is immediately considered as being a feminist viewpoint and therefore invalid. However, being almost half the population² in India, women’s critiques are much needed. For instance, there are many films being made which are deemed as being extraordinary, however, they tend to throw gender under the bus. Sometimes this is totally unintentional, ***“...because a lot of politics is***

¹ In 2012, the Swedish Film Institute began an initiative named ‘50/50 by 2020’ when one woman stood up said that their aim should be to have 50% (10% in 2012) women filmmakers over the next ten-year span and all the film festivals would have at least 50% films made by women for women, which they went on to achieve

²48.4% in 2023 according to <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-india#:text=India's%20population%20in%202023&text=48.4%20percent%20of%20India's%20population,percent%20lived%20in%20rural%20areas> and 48.41% in 2022 according to the World Bank

connected to social justice but it somehow doesn't include gender justice under that umbrella and films therefore mirror that". So, what are the collectives of women in the film industry doing to make sure that women's feedback and critiquing is given due weightage and that they are critiquing films in a way that men would not dismiss as being 'feminist ranting' and would actually listen?

Padmapriya Janakiraman: It is important to understand that one of the only ways to change this type of patriarchal approach- not only by men, but by some ***"women who are so deeply patriarchal that they cannot see"***- over time, is to show more cinema. One of the efforts that WCC is trying to make, as a part of a larger network that has formulated all over the country and not just as WCC, is to host small film festivals, monthly film screenings, which would encourage the 'right-kind' of conversations. This is a slow process which we cannot expect to happen overnight. Unless audiences and viewership are cultivated to that conversation, change cannot happen. However, there is still a lot of hope. The way forward is to pitch women's stories to platforms which give money, whether it is the box office or studios. For these pitches to be successful there is a need to start doing research that proves that the audience demographic is changing. WCC had done a little research project of their own by showing some film trailers with female protagonists or leads to younger audiences between the ages of 18-30. When asked why they felt that a specific trailer was 'cool' or 'interesting' the majority response was that they were not affected by the gender but rather by the content. This is a clear indicator of a changing viewer demographics. Thus, by doing enough pre-facto research on what kind of audience is going in, the possibility of commissioning more women's stories would increase. ***"So, there is a push pull that's happening, but it's happening in very silent spaces"***. However, in order to be effective and gain maximum impact, these efforts need to be made beyond women in the media. The nonprofit sector, researchers need to look into why things such as the #MeToo movement happened and what the systematic issues are that cause such movements and how they can be resolved. ***"So very much like we need evidence-based approaches for other types of gender related issues, e.g. gender budgeting in other sectors, we need the same thing in media and cinema. It's not very different. So, I think the onus is not just on us but everyone here."***

CHIEF GUEST: Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Bathinda, Shiromani Akali Dal Party

Sara Abdullah Pilot, warmly welcomed the next chief guest Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Bathinda, Shiromani Akali Dal Party, thanking her for taking the time out to attend this event, during such a busy time for her due to parliament being in session. She was



invited to share her thoughts, as a sitting member of parliament.

- **Being a girl child and woman is challenging:** Women and girls face so many hardships and challenges. For instance, if we take healthcare, it is clear that women's health is the least of everyone's (including the family's) concern. *"Being a politician and going to rural India, you really see what the 'real life' of women is. And I say hats off to them...the way they slog...the hardships they face are immeasurable...it's a challenge for a girl child to even be born. And once she is born, to get equal opportunities at home, it is almost impossible."*

- **Need for more women in politics; policy-making and decision-making roles:** Many issues women face, get tucked away neatly and do not even get addressed. Women are also not comfortable voicing these issues to male politicians and elected representatives, and so this is where women politicians become important and play a vital role in the empowerment and representation of women. **The more women in politics, the more women's issues will get addressed.** *"In 2009, when I became a politician, I was told that for the first time, women were coming out to political meetings and rallies because there was a woman standing from that area. Then when I became an MP, it started off with just 5% women participation in my public meetings and now in my last election, 80% were women. Why? Because being a woman, I would call them and ask them, 'Tell me what your problems are.' Because the panchayats were full of men and the women were not even asked to come even though there is a 50% reservation, and they would not even call the women members...The men would discuss about irrigation water and sadak [roads] etc. but when I asked the women separately about issues, they would say, 'You know we defecate in the open so could you make a four wall enclosure so we have some privacy?'...or they would say, 'Can you get us drinking water? My kids can't go to school as they have to help collect water from the nearest village which is so far away.'*

- **The Women's Reservation Act-** Even today, with all the progress we see, women still don't get equal representation. The fight has been on for so long for just 33% reservation and now it is finally passed, but it is still uncertain when it's actually going to come into effect. *"I spoke about this in my speech today, we talk about India becoming a 5 trillion economy by 2027...how about just saying whether by 2027 the parliament or Vidhan Sabhas [State Legislative Assemblies] will have 33% reservation or not. Then I asked 'date?' I was told, 'No date, because we don't know when the census is going*

to take place and it will take another 4-5 years for the delimitation to take place', so now we don't know whether it will happen even by 2037... "

- **A lot more to be done, yet all hope is not lost:** A lot has been done and progress made. However, there remains much to be done, not just symbolism and tokenism, as that will not get us very far. *"Yes, there is a lot to be done, but I must say hats off to the women, from where to where they have reached, despite all these challenges. It is very nice to see a woman president, the second one in my three terms. There was a woman presenting the budget as well- the finance minister. And even the debate was opened by a young woman MP from the tribal areas, so all these are all good signs."*
- **Each person must contribute, to move forward and upward:** Harsimrat Kaur Badal herself has made a lot of effort towards skilling local women. *"One of the first things I did when I got elected as an MP, I opened these skilling centres, stitching and embroidery... in about 500-600 villages , because I realized that the women want to get empowered, the girls want to be able to stand on their own two feet...when a woman is dependent on the man for her basic needs then she is going to get beaten up if the food is not okay or thrown out if he doesn't like her, so we must focus on empowering her. In the last few years, I have skilled 13,000 girls and then after skilling them, I give the machine and say, 'Now you've learnt a skill, go earn from it'. And I also tell them, ' ...from your earnings, you must help out another woman- buy some medicines for an elderly woman, buy some books for a needy girl etc.- let's all make a chain, then we can help each other.' The minute they get these opportunities they are running their own boutiques, one girl was able to educate her brother once her father died, another girl bought the first A/C in her house, another a washing machine and lots of them have bought their own jewelry and even paid for their own marriage. This is what women's empowerment is about, getting a space and opportunity for her to flourish, which is why we all need to come together...I hope that together we do manage to make a difference in the lives of those women who are at the bottom of the pyramid...we owe it to them."*
- **More efforts by the government:** There is no doubt that more efforts are needed from the government. *"...Governments can do a lot more than what they are doing, but until there are more women at the helm of things, who understand what the challenges are, I don't think men can really understand it. If they did then we wouldn't be having half the problems that we are."*

Q & A Session- Opening Plenary

- Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu- *"I think that it is wonderful that we have a woman presenting the budget, but I think now we are at the point where we want the budget*

to present something for the women... The numbers are stunning, we have the highest number of women in education in history, and yet it does not translate to jobs, more and more women are coming into parliament and yet all the indicators are showing that we are moving back. I don't know quite what to make of it. So, with regard to women in parliament, I think we are then looking towards a different kind of politics. We are looking towards women who represent us to overcome their political affiliations to build solidarity, and to really push women's issues. What do you feel are the prospects for that kind of politics?"

Harsimrat Kaur Badal: *" State governments play a very important role, as does the central government. Having been a part of the state as well as central government, I feel that at the state level, you are more hands on, you are more connected. The Chief Ministers (CMs) are more rooted with what the ground realities of their state are...everything I learnt, I learnt it from my father-in-law who supported and encouraged me so much... He had seen close to a 100 years of how India has evolved. He became a CM in Punjab five times...The first time he became CM he brought out the old age pension, which was way before anyone else did, and who thinks of old women?...and then he brought out a Shagun scheme to provide financial assistance to girls from poor families who wanted to get married. He implemented free rations for the poor women, way before it was done here, so their daughters wouldn't go hungry. He taught me that if you address women's issues it really empowers an entire family. He would identify poor girls from government schools who had done well but couldn't afford further education and paid for their higher education in institutions with state-of-the-art facilities and hostels. So, we had a situation where sweepers' and maalis' [gardeners'] daughters became doctors and engineers, just because they were given an opportunity by someone. I think right now, there is a lot more talk than action on the ground because most of the schemes have to be implemented by the state...I do appreciate what this government has done in the way of houses 'Ayushman' – 70% of it putting it on the woman's name. I think that's a good start. I think there is a lot more than can be done, if more women put their brain to it."*

Panel Discussion I: On the Frontline - Women in Political Leadership

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- The importance of women's collectivisation and leadership
- How do we build the pathways for women to claim their spaces and lead from the frontlines?
- How does women's participation and leadership contribute to a thriving democracy?

Moderator: Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Co-Founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

There could not have been a more relevant time for this panel to get together, as the general election is just a couple of months away and just a few days have passed since the presentation of the budget. The time for gender issues to become mainstream conversation is now, in the backdrop of the Women’s Reservation Act 2023 being passed in parliament after nearly three decades of resilience and advocacy by the women’s movement. **“ We are still trying to understand what it [the Women’s Reservation Act] means...this panel today is going to help us understand what we have in store for the next decade, as we move ahead.”**- Lora K. Prabhu, Co-Founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN



MODERATOR QUESTION: “ Please provide participants with a sense of the history of the women’s movement and participation which led us to where we are now.”

Panelist: Prof. Vibhuti Patel, Vice President, Indian Association for Women’s Studies

- **Women’s participation began in the early 70s:** When it comes to participation in social movements in India, women’s participation has been very robust since this time. Savitribai Phule and Fathima Shaikh, pioneers of the women’s rights movement, were educationists and social reformers who taught Indian women to step out of their homes, become part of society and claim their rights as women.
- **A vital role was played by India’s women freedom fighters:** There were about 15 women freedom fighters who played a vital role in the women’s freedom movement with their **“lung power, tongue power, they had the power of the pen, power of public speaking”** and their commitment to the women’s cause. They also had to struggle



against internal patriarchy within the Indian National Congress and the overall antipathy towards women.

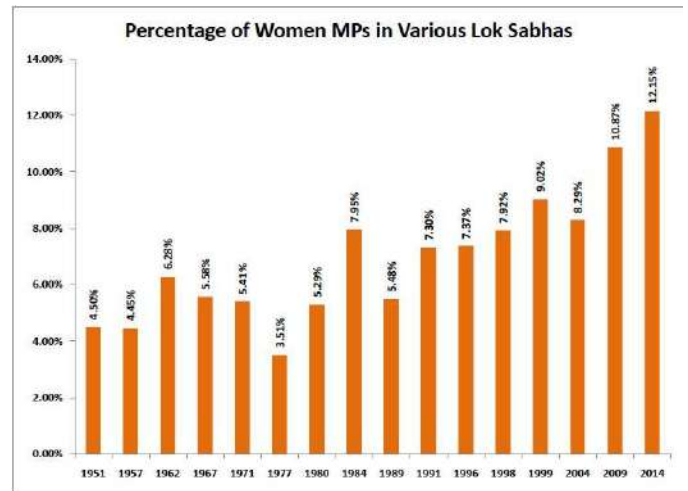
- **Slogans of the women's movement: 'The Personal is Political-** This was witnessed as far back as 1972 when women in tribal areas of Maharashtra were asking for an employee guarantee scheme, rightly claiming that politics is the only solution. "We **don't make coffee, we make policy'**- In 1975, women in the UN shared that every time they tried to voice their opinions, they were asked to bring a coffee instead. One woman took a stand against this, shouted back and said, *'I don't make coffee, I make policy'*. That got the attention of women across the globe and it became the starting point for active interest in politics among women. However,

when it comes to how women are viewed in politics and membership of political parties there is still a severe gap. ***"Despite 30-40 years of hard work for their parties they still remain foot soldiers. So, there is so much frustration."*** If we see it in this context, the passing of the Women's Reservation Act 2023 has its relevance, despite its intentions being debatable.

- **Gaining a 'toe-hold' in public spaces:** Over the last 30 years, although gradual, we have seen an increase in women's representation, with more women participating in public life. However, **women still face the 'glass ceiling and sticky floors'** and they have to still fight against that. ***"Affirmative actions are extremely important to deal with the historical injustices women have faced over the last 5000 years and that is why some of the national instruments like the National Perspective Plan for Women, or globally CEDAW...[have] become a touchstone for us to fight for our rights on a day to day basis and also in terms of coming up with tactics and strategies for our future."***
- **From 'toe-hold' to 'foot-hold':** It was only in 1993 that 33% reservation for women was made in local cell government bodies. Now nearly 1.6 million women are in the urban and local cell government bodies Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). All states and union territories, with the exception of Kashmir and Nagaland, have implemented this. More than 20 states have 50% reservation for women. Many women, after five or six rounds of winning elections are now thinking of entering into the larger political landscape.
- **Journey of the Women's Reservation Act 2023:** The bill was introduced in 1996 and now finally, in 2024 it has been passed in parliament. The main issues within reservation have been taken care of. Within the women's movement there have been many debates over it and the next question is, what kind of powers will women have?

- **India's standing with regard to women's reservation in South Asia:** Even in SAARC, India is considered to be **one of the countries which has the least participation of women in the higher echelons of power structure.** Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh have more.

- **Mobilization of women in political parties:** 'Stree Shakti' was mentioned by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1980s, and in the mid-90s the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), for the first time talked about women's land rights in Andhra Pradesh and created pressure for the other state governments, and the left parties have always talked about the rights-based approach. All of them have women's wings of the party. For the first time we see women's concerns being reflected in



the political manifestos. Even if they are not being implemented properly at least they are now acknowledging and giving space to women.

- **Percentage of women in elections from 1951 to 2014:** There has been a zig zag but now it is raised to 12.15%. In terms of numbers there has been a continuous increase, but the population of India and constituencies are also increasing, so in terms of percentage it has remained 10.6%.
- **Hurdles faced by women candidates:** Challenges such as **“money power, mafia power and muscle power (The Three Ms)”** are the main reasons that make the major argument for why we need reservation for women. Even those who were against it like senior leaders and freedom fighters later realized that it is very difficult even for the seasoned, locally rooted women activists to win elections because of these three key challenges.
- **Women as voters:** Indian women are now more aware of their rights, but their level of political information is still low.
- **Benefits of 33% reservation³:**
 - More humane policies for children, elderly, and persons with disabilities.
 - Official recognition of unpaid and paid care work performed for the care of children, elderly and sick members of the family and society.
 - More judicious implementation of gender responsive budgeting directed at reducing the gender gap in health, education, skill, employment, and promotion of women's decision-making power through capacity building.
 - Initiation of structures and systems to reduce GBV.

³ -Ibid-

- o Promotion of the policy of transformative finances for gender equality. e.g. Campaign started by elected women in Gram Panchayats 'Alcohol free villages in Maharashtra', forcing political leaders to stop diversion of wheat for production of beer in Punjab and distribution of the same wheat through PDS, using Panchayat funds for installation of the Gobar gas plant, *kanya shala*, piped water in the home, and toilet blocks for women in the rural and urban community.

MODERATOR QUESTION: “ Should we be excited about the Women’s Reservation Act 2023? What should we look out for and what does it hold for us in the future?”

Panelist: Tara Krishnaswamy, Co-founder, Political Shakti



- **Why do we have a reservation, and is that the only way out?**

- o **The status from 1952- 2024:** In the first elections (1952), we had 24 women, today, we have 78 women. That is an additional 54 women in 72 years! **“ Which means democracy left to itself in India is incapable of sending even one woman per year to parliament. That is how pathetic gender equity in politics has been.”** Therefore, there is a compelling need to fix that.

- o **False claims of progress:** There have been contentions of progress due to increase in the number of women in politics, however with respect to the increasing population, it is actually a regress. There is a marked lack of female MLAs across states, in comparison with their male counterparts. That is how stark the situation is.

- o **Need for women in parliament:** There is a clear need to get women into parliament, in order to avoid the above situation. When GST was introduced, we had 16% on sanitary napkins and 0% on diamonds, bindis, bangles and coca cola etc. As stated before, democracy has not been successful in putting women in parliament and this is what happens when we don’t have enough women in parliament. Because there is such a thing as critical mass leading to critical voices. **Without a critical mass we are voiceless.**

- **How did we end up here?**

- o **Myth- Women are not interested in politics:** This is far from true. The political parties themselves will claim that they have crores of women in their parties. E.g. Union Ministers claim that there are three crore women in BJP.
- o **Myth- Women cannot govern:** There are sufficient studies, including UN studies, that show that when women lead, there are lower corruption levels, less criminality and governance outcomes are equally good, if not better. However, even the high performing women in politics do not have a career ladder to climb nor a systematic way in which they can be absorbed into the political mainstream.
- o **Myth- Women are not winnable:** With regard to winning rates, in every single election in India, women have won at a greater rate than men. Therefore, **it is clear they are more winnable.** In politics, not only are women competing with men like in any other sphere- the economic or social spheres- but in political careers, they are facing an additional challenge that there are only a fixed number of spots. ***“So, we are taking away their positions and worse, taking away a position that gives them the power to run the country, to make decisions, to make policy and to change the fate of millions of people.”***
- o **Women not given due political recognition:** Most men in politics are not blazing new trails, instead they follow the footsteps of their fathers and uncles. They are using the same old ideology and leveraging and consulting the same people in the party, using the same network. We call that ‘dynastic’. However, for women the terms used are ‘dummy and proxy’ by their own parties. A respectable word like dynastic for men and completely different words for women. The gender gap is clearly visible here. ***“There was a statistic that said 46% women are making independent decisions in Panchayati Raj Institutions, but why are we not looking at how many men are making independent decisions and why aren’t we measuring that?”*** This would put it in real context.
- o **Need to give women opportunities in politics:** If we strip away patriarchy from society, in terms of giving women opportunities, not what happens afterwards, we will see that the average percentage of elected women on the whole, across India, exceeds 50%. ***“This means that if this opportunity is provided, more women than the reserved 33% would stand for elections and come into power.”***
- o **Power conceives nothing without a demand:** The women’s movement, historically and even today, continues to make demands. ***“The group that I founded Political Shakti has also made a lot of demands about this.”***
- o **Crux of the matter:** The problem is that parties do not offer tickets to women. The percentage of tickets to women/women candidates that the parties field is too small. When the input is so small, the output cannot be very high.

- **Does just building women's capacity suffice?**
 - **Men in politics cannot succeed without women:** Men in politics need to realize that they cannot succeed without women. As men, they are not going to be allowed access into many homes in their constituencies to talk to the women. Women constituents are also less likely to confide in them and tell them the problems they are facing such as why a particular scheme is not accessible to them, whereas they would feel more comfortable with a female politician.
 - **Build the understanding and awareness of men in politics through capacity building & training:** It is important to take men along on this journey because they are the reason why we are here. All the capacity building we do for women alone is not the solution, in itself.

- **What about the Women's Reservation Act 2023?**
 - The effort and work of all the women activists and politicians is the real reason that the Bill was finally passed. Another big chunk of the reason we are here is the women voters- the fact that we have almost equalized the voting percentage- which has now put pressure on politicians to acknowledge women as voters and give them something concrete.
 - The Women's Reservation Bill- '*Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*' is the 106th amendment, and much like the earlier version (the 108th amendment- which didn't fully pass):
 - 1) It reserves 33% seats for women (reserved in national legislature, the state assemblies and now the union territories as well).
 - 2) It applies only to lower houses, so it doesn't apply to either the legislative council- in the states that have it- or the Rajya Sabha.
 - 3) It provides for a rotation of seats. So, it is not the same seat that would be reserved for women.
 - 4) It applies to the scheduled caste/scheduled tribe (SC/ST) seats as well -33% of general quota and 33% in the SC/ST quota.
 - Three issues which are sticking points are a continuation of issues from before:
 - 1) This will only kick in **AFTER CENSUS AND DELIMITATION**. The next Census is due to start in 2026 and it will take a couple of years to complete. So, it will be another four years before the Census is complete. Thus, it **WOULD NOT** be in time for the next Lok Sabha election in 2024. After that, Delimitation is another 2/3 years cycle at the minimum, so again, it **CANNOT** happen in time for the 2024 Lok Sabha election. The **next Lok Sabha election after that will be in 2034** and so, **this is the EARLIEST at which the reservation can start!**

- 2) The 106th amendment has now passed and become the Women's Reservation Act 2023. HOWEVER, there is a 15-year term limit to it that says that the RESERVATION IS VALID ONLY FOR 15 YEARS! The wording is not very clear, as it says that the 15-year term begins when the Bill becomes an Act, and it is notified. So, if they notify it today, the 15-year clock starts ticking today! BUT the first reserved seats will not kick in till AT LEAST 2034 because of Census and Delimitation! So, ten years would have already been lost in the process, even before it starts, but then the 15-year clock has started ticking and maybe we'll just have the reservation for one cycle. **This puts us into a dangerous situation and the whole thing turns into campaign/election rhetoric instead of something substantive for women.**
- 3) The Bill per say is not a caste reservation it is a women's reservation bill. However, it does mirror the situation in parliament. There is no caste designation and reservation for women across the backward castes and also no word at all about minorities in the Bill.

MODERATOR QUESTION: " What does it really mean to have more women in politics? Are we going to look at a different kind of politics? What are you making of these conversations we have been having? "

Nandita Baruah, Country Representative-India, The Asia foundation



- **Importance of gaining access 'into the room':** This is the first step of any movement, and it comes in various ways. With regard to reservation, whether it was the 73rd, 74th amendment⁴ which gave access to women at the lower level of local governance or the current Act which we hope will give access to women, perhaps sooner rather than later (once they re-look at the challenges posed by the Act and rectify them), these are key milestones achieved.
- **Learn lessons from the past:** It is important to learn lessons from history and the journey of the women's reservation bill. What did the access women got earlier to the lowest level of the local governance- i.e. panchayats- mean? Women have progressed from just being seen as **"people who are keeping the seat warm for their husbands**

⁴ The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts (1992)- mandated the reservation of 1/3rd of seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and in urban local bodies

until the next election” to today, when more and more women are asserting their role in the panchayat in a more definitive political and social way. That did not happen overnight. It took a lot of time and effort by so many people to really prepare women for those roles.

- **Are the terms of reference [TOR] equitable?** However, despite women politicians being more active today and taking determined action, within the scope of what they are supposed to do at the local level leadership, there is still a large question that remains to be addressed and answered- *“ How well have women been able to dismantle the construct of power and politics which is very patriarchally-driven, even from that lowest level? ”* And that in itself, is a very long and arduous journey. We also need to look at the fact that now that women have got this access and are learning to do the job that they have to do, under which terms of reference are they having to do it? *“ Is the TOR of the job that women have to deliver on, being challenged and changed, or are they just made to deliver on a TOR that really was not equitable in the first place, because if it was, then women wouldn’t have had to ask for reservations and undertake the fights that they have had to.”*
- **The larger issue at hand:** Now that we have the access and space at the lower level and hopefully will get it at the higher level, the main thing to focus on is, *“ What are we going to do with that space?” How do we utilize the space once we have it and is there an opportunity to change the TOR? Is the conversation about saying an MP or an MLA needs to conduct himself or herself in a certain way which does not leave any room for any inequity or discrimination? Is the TOR different? Are women going to look at every bill, keeping in mind something as simple as “is this road meant for the water tankers in Delhi or is this road going to facilitate more women to reach workspaces?” This is the bigger question we are going to have to start asking ourselves even when we talk about access.”*
- **What needs to change?** As mentioned by Tara Krishnaswamy, more women are there today because they are voters. This is a good thing. Most political parties do believe that it is important to have the women vote bank with them, across party lines. And more and more women are coming out to vote. *“ Yet, at the back of everyone’s mind is also the fear of acknowledging that we may have women as voters, that’s great, but are we going to promote women as people who are going to come up and challenge the patriarchy within which we are asking them to vote?”* Unless that conversation is brought into the politics of access, not just in the political parliamentary system but across all institutions- whether it is the corporates, development sector, science and technology and so on- then there is no point. *“The whole politics of whether that access is going to allow you to change the framing of that very institution, from moving it*

away from the lens of patriarchy towards the lens of equity. Those debates and conversations have to happen but there is a great fear.”

- **The patriarchal language of claim and access needs to change:** There have been many great women political leaders, and it is interesting to look back and see how many of them were judged for corruption vis-à-vis how men political leaders were judged for corruption. Not just in India, or Asia but across the world. Women political leaders are often judged or questioned about their choices, and they are labeled ‘immoral’ or ‘anticultural’ whereas terms such as ‘enabling’ or ‘empowering’ are used to describe the same actions by men political leaders. **Thus, the language of claim and access still remains very patriarchal.** That perspective and framing is something we need to look at, as it has led us to the 3 Ms- Money, Mafia and Muscle which “...*are not by default, it is by design.*” In a way, it is the design of politics that enables people to really run it from the perspective of patriarchy and do away with the things that they do not like, which are equitable, not just for women but for all groups of marginalized people, in the name of culture and social norms. This is definitely something to think about as we prepare women to access these spaces. *“We’ve spent a lot of time really investing in women and you know sometimes when more and more women start occupying the spaces the paradigm shifts because then women are entering the spaces with the lens, stories and lives that they have lived.”* This is when change can happen.
- **Changing patriarchal perspectives and view of masculinity:** Sometimes, in very entrenched politics, women are forced to start applying the patriarchal lens to operate within the system and be seen as successful. *“So, when men say women are not good leaders, what they really mean is they are not good leaders because they are not doing what the men want them to be doing.”* However, the reality is that, *“They [women] are going to be good leaders if you change the paradigm and establish that power is not about aggression, being an aggressor or showing muscle. It is about empathy, care- giving and being inclusive. So, the softer dimensions of what is labeled as ‘feminine’, to me, are the most powerful dimensions. We need to bring this into the conversation of power and politics, if we want to make the change. Otherwise, the aggression of behavior, thought, and control, which are viewed as being successful and powerful traits, will not allow women to access those spaces the way they should.”* So, women in politics must start collectively accessing these spaces, and challenging the very core of some of those principles which have brought these spaces to the forefront. They must create a narrative that is going to challenge the reason why these were given to women versus the reason behind why, as CEQUIN said, we need it- *“That is ours, it is our right”*. **When it is their right, the space has to be defined with women’s realities and lived experiences,** not to be acted upon based on the lived realities and experiences of men. **The men too, need to change their perspective of masculinity.** They need to

realize that being masculine does not mean being aggressive, and that it includes being confident enough to adopt a softer dimension and being empathetic and caring. ***“That is why the work CEQUIN does with young men and boys and what Gender Lab does in Bombay becomes very important in changing the construct.”***

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“As per your experience as a woman political leader, what works for a woman in politics? Please share some of your experiences in Trinamool. Perhaps other states can benefit from these learnings.”*

Sushmita Dev, Former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, West Bengal, All India Trinamool Congress

- **The Women’s Reservation Act:** *“The Women’s Reservation Bill is a hoax!”*...because it is incumbent on two very tedious exercises- 1) CENSUS and 2) delimitation. So, *“[w]e are in a situation when your mom says I have cooked you lunch, but it is lying in that cupboard and it’s locked! So, you can’t complain ‘Mom why aren’t you cooking for me, neither can you eat that food. So that’s where women’s representation in the parliament is at.”*



- **Political parties are the gateway to politics:**
There is no denying the importance of political parties and the access they provide, regardless of whether it is for men or women. Thus, the primary duty lies with political parties to bring about change, by bringing in more women to electoral politics. In fact, not just electoral politics- because it is a fallacy to think that everybody wants to fight an election- but to bring women into positions where they actually have the power or a role to play in decision making within a party. There really is no excuse for a political party not to have more and more women sitting in positions of power within the party, apart from electoral politics.
- **Electoral politics and walking the talk:** *“I joined the All India Trinamool Congress party in August 2021. Before that I headed the women’s wing of the Indian National Congress and it was a very enriching experience. The difference, if you like, that I felt after joining Trinamool, was that they had already acted upon what we were aspiring to do.”* An interesting example- *“I went for a big political party event...the Hon. Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee was there. She has this tendency of not sitting, she just walks around on the stage. So, she walked around once or twice and she looked back,*

made a sign to somebody and within ...a minute and a half she changed the entire seating arrangement of our stage, and more than 50% women leaders were called on to the stage. And those of you who have watched or been involved in politics would know the significance of this...in a second, she changed the power dynamics. So, the question is, 'Are the political parties going to walk the talk?' like Smt. Mamta Banerjee who gave 41% women nominations in Bengal, (17 out of 42 seats), and the women did very well. Nine out of those 17 seats went through, so the strike rate was more than 50%. ***"Why did she do it...and how did she make it possible? The answer is simple. Mamta Banerjee is the 'vote catcher', she steers the party, people vote for her, so she used her popularity and her brand to propel more women into electoral politics."*** Thus, all it takes is political will and conviction of the leader to bring more women into electoral politics. This is something that all politicians must start emulating.

- **Other ways to bring more women into politics:** Theoretically, the Women's Reservation Act is in place, so the fight to get the Act in place is no longer the primary issue and focus. It is time for the non-profit organizations to get in the game, and approach different political parties, impressing upon them the need to work closely in partnership. This is when a real paradigm shift will happen, through systemic changes in the party. In the end, they will be the ones who will bring more women into the political system. Capacity building of women political leaders and empowering them is another area that can be worked upon by NGOs. After all, having women in politics and leadership roles cannot be tokenism. They must be as deserving of their position as everyone else.
- **Challenges in ensuring equality:** The toughest part of equality is that although it is our constitutional right, it is not always actionable, because of obstacles. ***"Can a daughter say to her father, because you are favoring my brother and not treating me equally because I am a girl, I am going to sue you in court? She cannot say that."*** There are still gender roles that prevail in the minds of many people. We cannot just get rid of this by claiming equality and rights.
- **Food for thought- dynasts:** We often give a negative connotation to 'dynasts' in relation to women in politics. However, ***"there are studies that will tell you that families have actually been the biggest facilitators of bringing capable women into politics."*** We shouldn't undermine the power of that, because the patriarchy, mindset and gender biases that we are talking about, more often than not, start from families. So, if we believe in affirmative action, then why not look at it like a quota to bring more women into politics. We shouldn't look down upon family as an institution which facilitates women to come into politics. On the flip side, there are many arguments against nepotism and that too cannot be ignored. However, we need to rethink the roles many families play in propelling women into politics, as it is an important channel.

- **Importance of a well thought out, impactful legislation and policy for women:** Policies and laws apparently passed to help women, often end up harming them instead. An example of this is the Maternity Benefit Act. Although it is absolutely correct that lactating, pregnant and mothers with infants, must be given space and time at the workplace, the way this law has been packaged has had a negative effect on women. This is due to the fact that it is being imposed on private companies without any financial impetus from the government. As a result, it has made women between the ages of 20 to 25 years, less employable. ***“...employers have started worrying about employing younger women. If this whole thing had been incentivised, as it has been done in many countries in Europe- such as a fiscal impetus, then it would have had a positive impact of bringing more women into the workforce.”*** Thus, it is very important for legislation for women not only to be enacted, but also have the impact of making that shift that we all want to achieve.

Q&A Session- Panel I: On the Frontline- Women in Political Leadership

- Pranav, Lawyer: ***“ Tara ma’am pointed out that there is a pre-existing problem in the parliament wherein there are no representation provisions for backward class individuals. Is there any policy formulation through which the issue of intersectionality, i.e. of backward class women, can be addressed and for that, do we need to address women as backward classes and for us to rethink the whole idea of backward classes for it to be dealt with in an integrative manner?”***

Tara Krishnaswamy: The parliament has not yet approached the issue of reservation through the lens of intersectionality. There are some states in which Muslims have been classified as backward caste or even in the Dalit quota, depending on their caste of origin, or their socio-economic backwardness itself. In certain states Christians have also been thus classified. However, from a national perspective, we do not have that. In fact, there are ideologies, for instance the prevalent ruling party’s ideology goes against the notion of ascribing caste to anyone other than those who identify themselves as Hindus or are identified as Hindus. **In some ways, that kills the whole process of intersectionality.** *“I certainly haven’t seen an approach towards intersectionality, but it is crucial, because we are not just one thing- I am a woman, I am a South Indian woman, I am from Bangalore- and then of course there are various other caste and religious locations that define me in the eyes of the law, whether or not I like it. And if you don’t come from a background of privilege, it becomes crucial, because that’s the only way to access state scheme benefits.”*

Vibhuti Patel: “With regard to caste-based reservation, in certain states Pasmanda Muslims have been given reservation. Buddhist Dalits fall under the reservation, however Christian Dalits have not yet got it. So, there are lots of anomalies with regard to this across states and union states.”

- Ghasiram Panda, ActionAid : “ **We work with elected representatives, especially with the Panchyati Raj system. We have observed that the unpaid care work burden is already with them and then on top of that if another responsibility comes on them- and the kind of ‘sitting fees’ [honorarium] that it is allocated to them as the elected representatives is extremely low-...how can we take the advocacy forward to improve things for them?**”

Vibhuti Patel: In India there is a low availability of creches “**only 10 %**” and it is something that is very important. Not only for women in the panchayats, but for all working women. The facility of community-based creches or creches within the workspace/private companies is essential. As mentioned by Sushmita Dev, this facility is not even available in parliament!

Tara Krishnaswamy: In Karnataka the government has just introduced ‘Koosina Mane’ creches to provide healthcare, nutrition, and safety for children whose mothers are employed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), as well as for other working women and mothers living in the vicinity. They take in newborn babies. This helps, as *Angandwadis*⁵ have an age limit- they don’t take infants. So, working mothers can use these creches until the infant is three years and then they can take them to the *Anganwadis*. The aim with Koosina Mane is to have at least one per panchayat. This perhaps could be replicated in other states as well.

Final comments by Panelists:

Vibuthi Patel- The journey of progressive legislation: From colonial times to now, every time progressive legislation for women has come into effect, it has backfired, in the short term. Yet, gradually over time and with campaigning, capacity building and conversations around it, it gets accepted. If we take the Maternity Benefit Act, we need to work more with employers and change their mindsets and create an understanding that it is not a favour that they are doing for individual women. That these women are producing the workforce that 20 years down the line will be contributing to the

⁵ *Anganwadi* centres/*Anganwadis*- are a type of rural child care center in India

country's economy. This mindset is already prevalent in most of the Eastern European countries.

- **Nandita Baruah- Let's move away from pushing the burden of care on to women alone:** When we talk about creches and benefits of maternity we are still pushing the burden of care to women. *"I think creches should not only be in places where women work, they should also be in places where men work. So that the woman can also have the option of sending the child with her husband to the creche at his workplace."* Furthermore, why is the six months maternity leave allocation only for women? **Why is there a presumption that it is the woman who will leave her job, stay home and care for the newborn baby for the initial six months. Shouldn't that be left to the couple to decide? "If the wife is pregnant and she doesn't want to take a break from her career, she shouldn't have to do so, just because she is the one who qualifies for six months maternity leave. Getting back into work after six months is not easy." This responsibility should be split up between the spouses, not thrust upon the woman. *"I think the law needs to be more responsive to how women and men are navigating their lives today. It is very retrograde thinking to say only women need to be given six months. So, I strongly believe that it is time to re-look at our Maternity Benefits and laws."***

Vibuthi Patel: Perhaps the wording of the Maternity Benefits Act could be changed- from 6 months maternity leave for 'mothers' to 'parents'.

- **Tara Krishnaswamy- Need for increased exposure of young people, especially young women, to politics:** In India, there are hardly any internship programmes etc. to actively engage young people in politics, but it is important. *"I would encourage young women...to go join election campaigns, to work with MLAs and MPs...You don't have to commit the rest of your life to that political party, or that MLA or MP...It will expose you to the governance and electoral aspect of it. Volunteer your time for this, to ensure acceptance by the MP or MLA. The experience and learning from this will be worth it."*

Panel Discussion II: The Role of Media in Building Narratives for Gender Justice

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The world is made up of stories about people, communities, and identities. In today's fast paced world, the boom of connectivity has unleashed a plethora of stories right at our doorstep- just one click away.

- However, what do these stories reinforce?
- What do they really tell us about the world, ourselves and other people?
- Whose story is being told?
- Who is the protagonist, the villain?
- Most importantly, what is in the story that is not being told?

Moderator- Raghu Karnad, Independent Journalist and Writer



MODERATOR QUESTION: *“What does the question ‘What can media do to shape gender justice?’ prompt in you, based on your encounters with media? What does it make you think of in terms of actual pieces of media that have come up on your screens recently?”*

Shaili Chopra, Founder, SheThePeople and Gytree.com

- **What not to do when telling women’s stories:** Poonam Pandey’s ‘death by cervical cancer publicity stunt/ awareness-raising campaign’ on Instagram, is a great example with which to start this conversation. Based on social media reactions, there seem to be many people out there *“...batting for this as an awareness idea that led people to start thinking about the term cervical cancer.”* Yet, many others felt that it left a ‘bad taste in the mouth’ and disagree that this is the way to set about increasing cervical cancer awareness. Undoubtedly, cervical cancer is a topic that needs a lot of attention and focus. *“But I think that there are ways in which you tell stories. There are ways in which you create awareness. We didn’t really need a Poonam Pandey to, suddenly one day, justify the work already being done by a 1000 others with a lot more depth...When it comes to women’s issues, why should stories be so ‘gimmicky’ that it ends up reducing the gravity of such an important issue like cervical cancer in a country like ours, where I think at a bare minimum 12-14% women die of it and many others suffer from it.”* That’s one way of looking at telling stories.
- **How to tell women’s stories:** The other is the absolute opposite of the spectrum. We never show women JUST HAVING FUN. Sadly, *“...the idea of a woman having fun, in the press, is flippant and the very fact that it is in the press is because it is flippant!”* So, what we end up getting are stories such as a woman celebrity exiting a disco perhaps, according to the press, not looking up to the mark or being drunk etc. *“However, if we don’t start looking at women as regular people- who succeed, fail,*

celebrate and enjoy- and start normalizing the press covering that...” we will not be able to move forward.

- **Middle ground:** While it is important for the media to be responsible and take on the serious stories about women’s issues and advocate on their behalf with non-gimmicky, tasteful coverage of the same, simultaneously they need to change the ‘holier than thou’ burden laid on women and normalize the way in which women are looked at, as regular people, who have the right to enjoy their lives, without always being judged.

MODERATOR QUESTION: “...*When talking about the media, there is no getting away from how provocation and breaking the rules seems to now be integral to the structure of media algorithms etc. That’s something we need to talk about further.*”



Namita Bhandare, Independent Journalist and Writer

- We have become consumers of content, not news: “*I am actually grateful to Poonam Pandey, for one reason. I don’t know whether anyone is more aware of cervical cancer because of her or not, but she has forced us to face a bitter truth- NEWS IS DEAD, WE ARE ALL JUST CONSUMING CONTENT. That’s what the reality is. People don’t read newspapers, they don’t watch television. They are watching reels. So, Poonam Pandey is the manifestation of the times we live in...*” where we are no longer consumers of substantial and solid news but are simply consumers of content.
- **What are the media stories that shape gender justice?** “*For me the turning point, without a doubt was December 2012- The Jyoti Singh gang rape and murder.*” The reporting on this opened up massive conversations across the board. “*Personally, it changed the direction of my work. Earlier I was writing about this and that, but for the last few years it has only been gender...I find it enriching. And it is not all doom and gloom.*” Another inspiring media story was the protest at Shaheen Bagh, because it shattered the stereotype of women who can’t have fun, while protesting. “*These were the dadis [paternal grandmothers] and nanis [maternal grandmothers], Muslim women, challenging stereotypes like ‘they can’t come out of their homes, they have to stay...hidden under their Burkas’ etc. They were laughing, singing and unbroken.*”

MODERATOR QUESTION: “*Did you see either of them turned into other forms of media, like re-packaged or adapted? I think that maybe the Netflix show ‘Delhi Crimes’ was based on the Jyoti Singh Pandey story.*”

Namita Bhandare, Independent Journalist and Writer

- **A story that moved the world:** Delhi Crimes with Shefali Shah was indeed based on the Jyoti Singh case, and the script was fairly faithful to the facts. That was an incredibly powerful story and it got various types of media coverage. *“I made a small documentary film on it...The first time we went to meet her mother, they had not yet been given government housing. I will never forget her, and my hair still stands on ends. We were all in this tiny room, with the entire production team, and these men put down their equipment and they were all just weeping. There was something in that girl’s story that I think moved the entire country in a way that nothing else has...”*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“What has been on your mind or screen recently?”*



Revati Laul, Independent Journalist, Activist and Film-maker

- **Conversations that shift the way we look at gender:** It is good to have a look at gender conversations in the media that have shifted the way we look at gender and media:

1) **‘The Mooknayak’:** This site is named after ‘The Mooknayak’ newspaper founded by Dr. Ambedkar. Mooknayak means ‘the leader of the voiceless’. This site was founded by Meena Kotwal, a Dalit woman journalist, *“who felt practically reduced to an invisible phenomenon in mainstream newsrooms.”* She realized that in order to be a successful

journalist, she would have to become her own editor and create her own media space. *“So, when a Dalit woman creates her own media space, how does it change the way we look at media overall?”* When one visits her site, one sees a very different hierarchy of news. This site doesn’t break down news into politics, sports, entertainment, finance, business and horoscopes. Instead, it breaks the news down into ‘Dalit, Tribal, Education, Health, Farmer, Climate Change, LGBTQ, Discussion etc. *“That by itself tells us that when you put someone in charge of a newsroom, who has not had that space before, they begin to look at politics differently. And that spoke to me very loudly, because I remember dealing with very conventional newsrooms- very empowered women, but still very conventional- from 1990 onwards. I always felt, yes I am interested in politics but I am not interested in a blow by blow account of what Sharad Pawar is doing. And why does that make me a lesser political animal than the next person?”* The reason behind this thinking is

that the manner in which politics and elections are covered runs counter to the way conventional women are raised in their homes. When one is raised to think more about food, clothes, and aesthetics, then why should that be lower down in the pecking order and assigned to 'features'? Why is that not politics? ***"It takes a Meena Kotwal to shake that up."***

2) **Agents of Ishq**: This is a website that highlights issues such as sexuality, love and desire. It was founded by Paromita Vohra, a filmmaker, and writer. Through this website she aims to create positive and enabling conversations around sex, including different sexual orientations. ***"I was looking at the lineup of stuff on her page...and there is some really exciting stuff. When we say 'pleasure' it is all there, up front-how to talk about sex, what fun conversations these are- it is about putting pleasure back in the centre."***

- **Making change by supporting alternative media spaces**: We are talking about the horrors of Bollywood and the creation of male tropes like Animal, where the protagonist is just standing there and gunning people down etc. ***"So why does that testosterone fused with violence sell? It has also become the mainstream of our politics. The BJP fuses violence in this way and reduces women in this way."*** We have to look at an alternative in our media spaces, and stand up and say ***"...why are we always talking about gender in terms of violence and rape? I refuse to reduce gender conversations to this. Why can't we talk about the way grandmother's told stories? When we talk about the woman voter, can we zoom in- who is a woman voter? Is she tribal, Dalit, Muslim, or is she a mix of these things? And how is she a separate slice from Dalits, tribals etc.? We don't ask these questions because we are not actually looking deep. It is just tokenism."*** However, there are spaces that are doing a great job of making us think. ***"We need to look at those spaces and power them. And the more we hero spaces like Mooknyak and Agents of Ishq, the more money will flow in that direction and mainstream it."***

Moderator: ***"I am glad you brought up Mooknyak because first of all it highlights that there is non-metropolitan, non-elite media coming out of new places, empowered by technology. I generally have a bleak view of technology, but voices like these really get to reimagine what the news should look like and what it means. It can also throw a spotlight on fun, pleasure and things that aren't dictated by our gaze on rural women or non-elite women."***

MODERATOR QUESTION: ***I think there are lots of connections to be made here. What are your views on this?"***



Sapna Kedia, Assistant Director, Gender - Social Development, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

- **Media must take into account the contradictory nature of the human personality:** *“I am a huge consumer and fan of Bollywood...but I am also someone who works on gender justice. These two parts of my personality come out in contradictory ways in my work, in my conversations. For example, I have read a lot of articles about the film ‘Animal’ and I echo why it's problematic, but I have also had conversations with people about what they liked about this movie.”* It is these contradictions that the media needs to pick up on and highlight.
- **Gender can also be showcased in a light and fun way, without taking away from the seriousness of the issue:** Talking about and showcasing gender does not always have to be very heavy. *“When we go into villages and work with young men and boys and ask them, ‘What is it that you find funny and that you enjoy watching?’, they say, ‘On TikTok there is Bablu Dablu, where they keep on teasing each other etc.’ and they find it funny. Or they will talk to you about how they enjoyed watching Bahubali. If you ask if they find the teasing of girls funny, then they will say, ‘No that’s not good, but the whole scene overall is fun’.”* These are the contradictions of human nature. Yet, it is concerning that impressionable adolescent boys are picking up notions of masculinity from such films. *“...he saves and rescues everyone. We should also do this.”*
- **What is it that we seek from the media?** As consumers of media, *“...we are looking to the media for respite. Sometimes we want it to give us a route to escape, sometimes we want it to show the reality, sometimes are looking at it as a medium of change.”* So, these contradictions and expectations are what need to be accounted for and showcased. *“Even when we talk about gender, movies like ‘Thappad’ [slap], we can agree or disagree with it, but still it is such a powerful movie. At the same time, it is also a typical Bollywood entertainment movie with good music etc. and it successfully showcases the contradictions in relationships...”* This is because gender is all-pervasive, and a part of our daily lives. *“It’s contradictory, and we are constantly negotiating. I think sometimes when we portray or talk about gender, we very conveniently take it into the black and white, and we miss out on the grey.”* Gender conversations or portrayals don’t always have to be serious and without fun and pleasure. And based on field experience, *“I feel people consume media for change, but they also consume media for respite in terms of escaping their own realities- such as the norms of masculinity that perhaps they themselves have to go through.”* This type of

contradiction is very difficult to capture, but it is the need of the hour. So, the media needs to look into and talk more about 'the grey'.

MODERATOR QUESTION: *"...Revathi Laul once wrote for The Wire... about a young woman from Shamli (a small town in UP)... Someone with quite a difficult life who found a new side of herself on TikTok. Do you think that story gives us a lead into this subject?"*

Revathi Laul, Independent Journalist and Film-maker:

- **Media needs to stop portraying women as 'victims':** By nature, women are subversive. We are skilled in the art of getting what we want, even if we need to take an indirect route to get there. The media needs to stop portraying all women as victims. There are many women out there, even in rural areas, who have plenty of agency. *"Living in Shamli has changed the way I look at women. We need to stop putting women in boxes. Why does a working-class woman have to be a victim? Why can't she have agency?"* For instance if we look at *"...the rape of a Dalit women in Hathras, UP⁶...the reason this woman was raped was not because she was Dalit but because she decided to spurn the advances of an upper caste man. Yet, when we write these stories we write them as if the woman is always this flat character who doesn't have any agency. The main thing is that women have agency and they are very subversive. In the villages where I work in my avatar as an activist in Shamli, Western UP, there are so many women who do such interesting things."* A couple of these stories:
 - **The Tik Tok sensation from Shamli:** This story was about a working-class woman from Shamli, who was working in a factory making spoons. She had become this amazing TikTok video maker. This was in the days when TikTok was dominating everyone's time in India. In fact, she had made hundreds of videos during the Covid-19 pandemic and they were lovely, funny, sexy videos. But then her phone got stolen and as these videos were stored on it, we didn't get to consume all the videos, we only got to hear about those videos from her.
 - **A well-carved out happily ever after:** There was a gay couple in a remote village in Shamli. Everyone in that village knew that they were a lesbian couple, but due to conventions and legality they were unable to get married. So, the villagers had come up with a clever plan to circumvent these obstacles and help them. They were hoping to arrange marriages for them to two brothers in the same family or to two contiguous families, so they could still continue to be in their relationship.

⁶ Hathras Gang Rape case: On 14 September 2020, a 19 year old Dalit girl was raped gang-raped in Hathras district, Uttar Pradesh, India, by four men, allegedly upper cast

“Women are naturally subversive, we got to be. Because we are dealing with men. Actually, that’s a great way to look at politics. Say ‘yes’- the words the regime wants to hear- and then go do the opposite...”- Revati Laul, Independent Journalist and Film-maker

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“I think it’s very useful for us to pay attention to what media online means, for a little bit. We can’t ignore that by any means. Shaili, you started what is now a major online hub for feminist discussions and for talking about women’s lives... When you are editing ShethePeople, is there a particular field...of human life or society that you think has been the most fruitful to talk about?”*



Shaili Chopra, Founder, ShethePeople and Gytree.com:

There are many fields, and they keep changing. The key area that has really boomed is:

- **Women’s health:** *“There is a clear lack of even basic awareness among women, when it comes to their own bodies. Something as simple as one breast being smaller in size than the other and why?”* So, ShethePeople started exploring health topics related to women’s health and putting out content by doctors, in various languages (English, Hindi, Bangla, Tamil etc.), talking about the female body and the importance of understanding it. One of the first videos that went viral on YouTube was ‘What to ask a gynaecologist on your first meeting with her?’ *“...I decided let’s pick health and let’s see where we go with it. We weren’t even on YouTube until that first video on ‘What to ask a gynaecologist?’ and boom, last week we crossed 1.1 million! It just goes to show that the things that one thinks about the least, based on the assumption that surely these are known facts, turn out to be areas that need the most exploration and coverage. If women don’t know about their own bodies, then who does? As it turns out, no one, including women!”*
- **Technology and women’s health:** Technology has played a huge role in helping to create awareness of women’s health. For instance, through ShethePeople, came Gytree.com- the online platform from which services are offered for women’s health. *“I would thank technology a lot, around women’s health, in terms of...enabling these conversations requiring 100% privacy, to happen online.”*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“ As a researcher on women’s health, reproductive rights and sexual relations, recently you were the lead researcher on a report on ‘Male involvement in marital abortions.’ There is so much complexity to that, and it makes me wonder, from your research in that particular question, did that reveal anything about... the media people were consuming- videos people may be seeking out on the internet and finding information or inspiration?”*

Sapna Kedia, Assistant Director, Gender - Social Development, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

- **The study:** This study explored men’s feelings, their vulnerabilities pertaining to abortion. It also involved listening to them. Although, the circumstances of these premarital pregnancies were debatable – what led to the pregnancy etc- the men were very clear that they wished to support their partners. As per the study, ‘the support offered’ included a promise of marriage, going to a clinic far away and organizing a medical abortion for their partner, arranging money and ensuring that a female friend of their partner would be present for them throughout etc. At the initial stages of the process, the men were very wary of being asked questions. *‘Why do you want to talk to us about this? What is your ulterior motive? Because when we go to service providers, we are looked at as perpetrators...[they] do not want to engage with us, especially because it is a premarital situation.’* These boys are themselves young people who also have aspirations which may not necessarily align with immediate marriage- *“There is a pregnancy, but we don’t want to get married, so we want to go through with an abortion.”* The study revealed that these young men often felt judged- *“If I don’t promise marriage, then I am considered a perpetrator or exploiter.”*
- **Learnings from study:** *“That study made me realize that these young men were trying hard to escape...being classified as the perpetrator.”* One of the boys was surprised at being asked about his feelings. *“Are you asking me how I felt during the abortion? Are you actually asking me about my feelings and not the logistics of it? No one has really asked me how I felt- I felt very upset, I felt I had let down my partner, I felt ‘I wish I was in a position to perhaps marry her if that’s what she wanted’, but I did not want to get married at that point of time.”* Linking it back to the question on the media, *“...perhaps the problem is that the media...are not talking enough about masculinities, vulnerabilities of young men, along with talking about privileges. Of course, men are privileged. They have been privileged for a very long time. But they are also pressured. And where are the spaces for them to escape from this gaze?”*
- **Need for more sensitive media coverage:** A good example of this was the Malayalam film ‘Kaathal-The Core’. It speaks about a gay man...*“I think the whole movie spoke*

about coming out, and the challenges one faces, in a conversational manner.” It was a beautifully made film that didn’t sensationalize superficial, gimmicky issues like ‘this man cheated on his wife with another man, he was a closet gay person who ruined his own life and the life of his wife’ etc. ***“It spoke about daily nuances. I think that’s what we have to look at, when we speak about gender in the lives of men and women, children and adults, and even the lives of elderly- which we hardly speak about- and also people across the spectrum.”***

MODERATOR QUESTION: “...Namita, please help us wrap up. You started out by mentioning something that had to be mentioned, this seismic moment for Indian media and Indian gender discourse, which was the 2012 rape and killing of Jyoti Singh and we have seen major moments of gender discourse that necessarily had an antagonistic quality in terms of how they talked about men and women. #MeToo comes to mind in the last couple of years. But there is also something else that is coming out of this conversation and that is some attention to pleasure, to relationships and to different positions men can have vis-à-vis gender justice and supporting women. Since you are an ‘official gender editor’...tell me how that adds up for you.”

Namita Bhandare, Independent Journalist and Writer

- **We must not become complacent- the battle is not yet won:** A lot of boxes have now been ticked- the recently passed budget has the largest percentage ever, in the history of gender budgeting, ear-marked for gender. Theoretically, we now have 33% reservation for women with the passing of the Women’s Reservation Act. We have ‘Stree Shakti’ and these wonderful slogans like ‘*beti bachao beti padhao*’ (*save the girl child, educate the girl child*). Alongside this, besides politics, we also have an incredibly aspirational generation of young girls- girls in villages- who want to play football, who want to do ‘*kushti*’ [a form of wrestling], fathers who are saying go and do *Kushti*. In this context, we need to be careful not to reach a state of complacency. In six states of India, there still exists laws that prevent inter-faith marriage. Honor killings are still rampant, demand for registration of live-in relationships and other such controlling measures are in effect. ***“I think we are not realizing just how dangerous the times are. We are not in emotional times like 2012, but we are in a very dangerous moment in our history. The women’s movement is literally built on the blood and bones of women...we need to safeguard and protect our very hard-won freedom.”***

Panel Discussion III: The Missing Growth Story of Women in the Economy

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In recent times, there has been an improvement in literacy rates and education, and more girls are being retained in school. But at the same time, **only 24% of women in the entire country participate in the economy and the workforce.** We also know that there is a direct correlation between the rise in structural violence and GBV, and the decreasing rate of women's participation in the workforce.

- What is really missing when we look at India's growth story?
- Is there a need to consider women's economic participation?
- What are the problems that can happen for a country, if women's participation is overlooked?

Moderator- Prof S. Chandrasekhar, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research

"...What new value addition do economists bring to the table? I think we 'data geeks' quantify the extent of the problem, and to a major extent CSO/NGOs...provide clues in terms of what might work and what might not. With regard to our panelists, Dr. Manna is a data producer. The other panel members, Dr. Priyadarshini, and Bidisha Mondal are data consumers. However, within this, they too collect their own data."

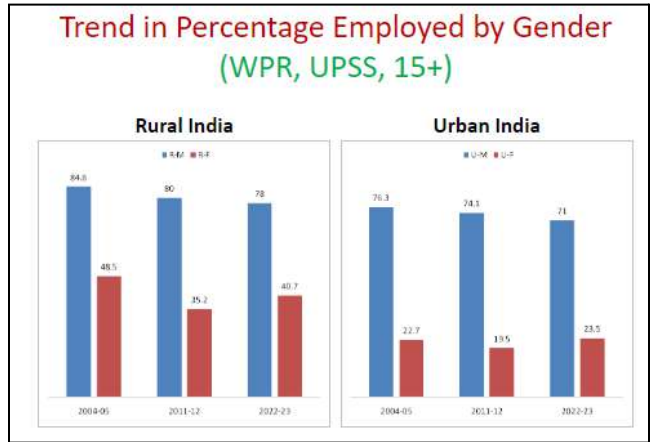


MODERATOR QUESTION: *"Today's panelist have coordinated a story...which they will now share with you."*

Dr Gurucharan Manna, Senior Advisor, National Council of Applied Economic Research

- Overall impressions of the Indian labour market over the last few decades:

- o India has a very low women's labour force (LF) and labour force/work force participation rate (LFPR/WFPR)- compared to high/middle-income countries.
- o India's economy has a predominance of women in the informal sector.
- o There is a huge gender gap in employment.
- o Problem with the quality of jobs- pay parity etc.
- **There is a huge gender disparity in work participation rates-** When looking at male vs female in the category of 15 years and above, over two decades, in rural and urban areas, we see that in rural India about nearly 80% of the men are employed as opposed to the women who are at half that rate at approximately 40%. When it comes to urban India, the situation is worse, as the female participation rate is only about 24% as against the male work participation rate of 71%. But it is also important to note that in rural India the reason for a higher number of women in the workforce, as compared to men, is due to the fact that a majority of these women are employed in the agricultural sector.



- **Additionally, there are state level divergences in women's participation rates, making them even lower than the national averages:** In rural India, the participation rate of women is about 40% but there are state level differences. For instance in some states like Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Manipur, Punjab etc., the women work participation rate is much lower than the national average of 40%. In urban India, the national average is about 24%, but in Bihar, Delhi, UP etc. the percentage is even lower than that.

Major States with Low Employment Rate (%) 2022-23

Rural: (National average: 40.7%)
 ASM(19.3); BHR(23.0); HAR(20.5);
 MAN(28.7); PUN(26.3)

Urban: (National average: 23.5%)
 BHR(11.4); DEL(14.8); HAR(18.2);
 JHK(15.7); UTK(15.1); UP(12.6)

- **Employment rate among different education levels:** If we look at the situation in rural India, it seems that **the bigger problem is faced by women with more education.** This means that the women who have completed their secondary education or are graduates are even less likely to get employment. Perhaps due to lack of suitable jobs. Urban is also more or less similar.

Employment Rate among Different Education Levels (WPR, UPSS, 15+): 2022-23

	All	Sec+	Gr.	PG+
R-M	78.0	69.6	77.4	83.4
R-F	40.7	29.2	28.3	42.2
U-M	71.0	66.7	74.0	80.3
U-F	23.5	22.1	28.1	39.6

- **Percentage distribution of all the workers by the status of employment:** When it comes to rural women, we see nearly 43% (nearly half of the working women) are working as domestic workers. So, although self-employed, they are assisting in the household of the

actual owners, not working for themselves. Sadly, only 8% of them are regular waged and salaried workers (RWS) and are eligible to access security and benefits. The lot of the urban Indian women workers is slightly better, with only 12.8% working as domestic workers in other's homes, while the majority of these women are RWS. However, we must bear in mind that the total number of women in employment is considerably lower in urban areas as compared to rural India (24%: 40%). Another problem in rural India is that among the women employed, nearly 1/5th (21%) engage in casual labour (CL) as opposed to the lower number of 8.9% in urban India. So, they don't have much job security and peace of mind.

- **The trends in wage disparity by gender:** The data over two decades, indicates that **although it is still prevalent**, wage disparity has declined over time. In 2011, in rural India, women wage workers were getting almost 38% less wages than the men. However today the disparity has reduced to 20%. This is also the case of wage workers in urban areas

Type of worker	Sector	2011-12	2017-18 Q4	2022-23 Q4
RWS	R	37.5	29.4	20.0
	U	21.9	21.1	20.4
CL not PW	R	30.8	36.5	31.0
	U	39.2	40.0	35.3

although the disparity has reduced to a lesser extent. Among all types of workers, CL is the worst one, as they don't have regular employment. Among them you see, both in rural and urban the decline in disparity is not very significant today. A CL in rural India is getting 30-31% less than their male counterparts, and in urban India it's 35% less.

- **Average daily wage of women CLs is very low:** According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data, rural women are getting only INR 297 per day as opposed to INR 416 that the men are getting. In urban India, women are getting INR 333 vs the INR 515 earned daily by men. **The fact that CLs in rural India are earning below India's minimum wage of INR 300 (specified for unskilled workers in Agriculture, prescribed in 2017 by the Ministry of Labour) and that urban women are just earning INR 33 above it, is truly appalling.** The guiding principle behind fixing the minimum wage is that any worker should be given a wage, on a daily basis, that should be adequate for his/her to maintain a decent standard of living *"to take care of nutrition and other associated costs..."*
- **The 2011-12 Employment-Unemployment survey⁷:** Women engaged in domestic duties, were asked 'would you be willing to accept work (i.e. gainful employment), if the work is made available at your household premises, and what type of job and facility would you need?' The findings were:
 - Nearly 60% of the women workers were engaged in domestic duties because **there were no other family members willing to take on these duties.**

⁷ Employment and Unemployment Survey of India, July 2005 - June 2006, NSS 62nd Round, 2005-2006, by the National Sample Survey Office

- o Out of this 60%, in rural India, nearly 1/3rd of the women predominantly engaged in domestic duties, said **they would be willing to accept gainful employment if work was made available within the household**. In urban India it is about 30%.
- o The type of work that they considered acceptable were **tailoring, dairy, poultry, spinning and weaving and food processing**.
- o The types of assistance required were **initial finance on easy terms, working finance and training**.
- **Steps required to resolve issues-** Some state policy interventions are necessary to address the highlighted problems. The way forward would be to encourage more and more women to become gainfully employed. In the case of women doing domestic duties, it is important to create job opportunities for them within the household and provide financial and other assistance, in order to motivate them. This would definitely improve the situation of the low WFPR of women.

MODERATOR QUESTION: “Bidisha Mondal will now share her findings on a five-state study.”



Bidisha Mondal, Research fellow, Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality (IWWAGE) - an initiative of LEAD at Krea University

- **Existing evidence of women’s LFPR in India:**
 - o **Latest PLFS findings- low female LF participation rate (FLFPR) in India:** Women’s LFPR also known as FLFPR has increased from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23 (PLFS, 2023). However it is still lower than the male LFPR in India which stands at 79% (PLFS, 2023). This is not uniform across the age cohort or education level. For instance, if we take the age cohort of 15 to 29 years, the FLFPR is very low at 24.5%. **“...this might be due to women pursuing education at this age cohort”**. The FLFPR is also very low for women that have just completed the higher secondary level of education. **“This might be due to the ‘u’ shaped relationship between education and FLFPR ...according to the ‘u shaped theory’, when women get secondary or higher secondary level of education, they generally feel uncomfortable with the low skilled, low wage work. So, they generally drop out of the LF.”** When a global comparison is made against the ILO 2019 estimates, although the FLFPR in India has risen from 21.5% (2017) to 24% (2022), it is still marginally lower than the South Asian average which stands at 25.6% and much lower than the global average which stands at

47.3% (2022). *“This is despite the country witnessing high economic growth in the last 2 decades...higher economic growth is supposed to lead to higher economic opportunities and that is supposed to lead to an enhanced FLFPR. But this hasn’t happened in India...”*

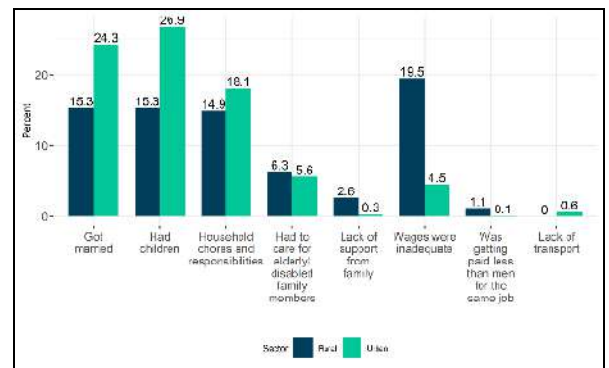
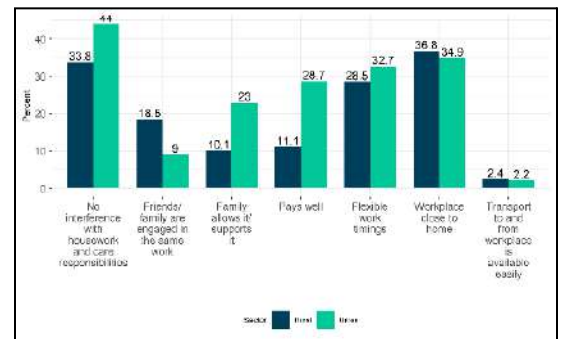
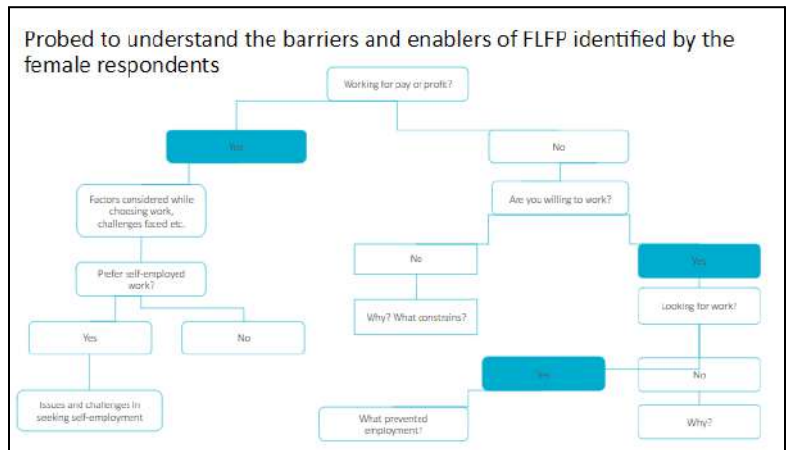
- o **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data:** The fertility rate in India has declined from 4.04% (1990) to 2% (2019-21). *“A decline in fertility rate is supposed to be associated with an increase in FLFPR due to less childcare responsibilities. However, that also has not happened in India.”*
- o **Increased educational attendance:** increased educational attendance among Indian women which **should have translated into an increase in the FLFPR, but this is not the case.**
- o **Other studies done to solve this puzzling data:** In order to explain the low FLFPR, findings from these numerous studies indicated that:
 - Household and individual characteristics are creating a barrier for FLFPR.
 - Factors like lack of employment opportunities.
 - Measurement issues in LF surveys lead to underestimation of the FLFPR.
 - Restrictive social norms.
 - Lack of public infrastructure to promote FLFPR.
- **Need for continuous evidence generation:** Despite all these studies and findings, there still remains a need for more data in order to capture the changing labour market dynamics- which is getting influenced by the adoption of technology, digitalisation drive etc- in order to understand the current situation.
- **IWWAGE Study:** It was driven by the need to understand the current FLFPR.
 - o **Study design:** Based on a large-scale household survey. Interviewed 5000 females and 1000 males approximately, across five states- Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Karnataka. The choice of states was based on the FLFPR- a mix of well performing states and a few poorly performing states.
 - o **Aim of study:** To unravel the enablers and barriers in women’s workforce participation and try to put forward some actionable policy recommendations.
- **Key findings of the IWWAGE Study:**
 - o **Skill training- a great enabler of the FLFPR:** Women who receive skill training are much more likely to join the LF. The findings also indicated that the preference for skill training is concentrated in three sectors; sewing and stitching, computer and related applications and beauty parlours. However, there is a disparity between urban and rural women, rural women lag behind in terms of awareness of these skill training programmes and receiving skill training.

- o **Mobility as a barrier:** Women generally prefer workplaces closer to their home. According to them, up to 20-25 minutes for commuting to their workplaces was comfortable for them.
- o **Childcare responsibilities as a barrier:** Women who belong to households with infrastructure such as piped water, electricity and cooking gas were more likely to join the LF. Therefore, investment in these basic household infrastructure leads to reduced unpaid activities, thereby giving them more time to join the LF.
- o **The wealth effect:** Women who belong to wealthier households are less likely to join the LF. This is because of the existing gender roles, where women are supposed to be the secondary income earners.
- o **Impact of education:** Women with education level of graduation and above (i.e. tertiary level of education) are less likely to be part of the LF. This finding is in contrast with the common 'u-shape theory' which says that once women reach the tertiary level of education, their LF force participation increases.
- o **Marriage as a barrier to FLFPR:** Married women are a lot less likely to participate in the LF, as they face stricter social norms.

● **Enablers and barriers to FLFPR, as per female participants, IWWAGE Study:** Probing questions were

asked in the following manner in order to better understand the enablers and barriers for workforce participation:

For the working rural women, proximity to the workplace was a key factor, in terms of selecting and retaining the job. The second most important factor was their ability to do their household chores and care duties along with the job. The third most important factor was flexible work timings. Similarly, for urban women, the most important factor was their ability to perform their domestic and care responsibilities along with the job, followed by proximity of workplace to home, and flexible work timings. Responses of the women



currently not in the workforce helped see the factors that are constraining them from LF participation. Among the rural women, responses indicated that the most important factors for them were inadequate wages (which were disincentivizing them from employment). Other key constraints listed were childbirth and then marriage. Among the urban women the main barrier was seen to be household chores and responsibilities and getting married.

- **Actionable points arising from the IWWAGE Study:**

- Raising awareness, setting targets in skilling programmes and encouraging enrolment in non-traditional skilling courses.
- Providing safe and affordable transportation to circumvent mobility issues.
- Creating closer to home, paid work opportunities to help women avoid the long-distance commute.
- Increasing investments in household and care infrastructure like childcare facilities to overcome barriers of care responsibilities.
- Encouraging workplaces to provide flexible work hours.
- Creating quality work opportunities for highly educated women
- Changing gender norms through mass campaign programmes.

Moderator: *“I want to take [a few] seconds to tell you how the story is evolving. India has a very low FLFPR. The question is why? Dr. Manna laid out the context. The study done by IWWAGE highlighted a key point, ‘Is it a demand side issue or a supply side issue?’ Demand means employers are not willing to hire, supply means women don’t want to work. Thus, there is actually no clear resolution of what drives it...Also, the question to which we really don’t have an answer to, unless we have great data is, ‘Why are women actually paid less?’ Is it because they are working fewer hours or, in terms of low productivity? While female education has increased, what is happening to returns to education is an important point. And what happens to perceived returns to education?”*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“Now let us look at what is happening in one particular state of Bihar, based on the great insights that Dr. Priyadarshini will bring, in her presentation.”*



Dr. Anamika Priyadarshini, Senior Specialist, Research, Centre for Catalyzing Change, India

- **FLFPR in Bihar remains low despite progressive policies:** Bihar is one of the most progressive states with regard to policy, however whether it is getting translated to reality or data points is another matter. For instance, Bihar

was the first state that reserved 50% seats for women in the Panchayati raj system, in 2013 there were 35% seats in government jobs starting from police, and by 2016 the state had reserved 35% seats for women. However, the FLFPR still remains a huge challenge for Bihar.

- **Exploring the ‘sticky floors’ in Bihar- How social norms are obstructing women:** This is based on a large-scale study conducted by the Centre for Catalyzing Change.
 - Background and study design: The study was conducted in the backdrop of the government of Bihar launching a campaign in 2017 to put an end to child marriage. It was conducted in 12 districts of Bihar, with 12600 people across the districts. Out of the 12 districts, six had a high prevalence of child marriage, three had medium prevalence and the other three had low prevalence.
- **Findings:** Drawing from this study, three social norms obstructing prospects of women’s economic participation were observed:
 1. ***Low perceived utility of girls’ education***
 - Low overall perceived utility of education (PUE): There was a clear gap in the aspiration in parents, when it came to the girls. They felt that girls should be educated only up to 10th or 12th , but boys were allowed to study further, to whichever level they wished to- i.e. Masters, PhD etc.
 - Societal Pressure: PUE was lowest among the secondary gatekeepers, i.e. community leaders. Parents (primary gatekeepers) and youth (girls 14-24, boys 16-26 years) explained that parents experienced societal pressure to prioritize their daughter’s marriage over their education and career.
 - Lack of economic opportunities: Despite the rise in education of girls, findings indicate a lack of increase in economic opportunities for women or that they are being absorbed into jobs. This leads to a lack of inspirational role models.
 - Gender norms: Usually gender norms are internalized, but in this study, it became clear that the girls are painfully cognisant of their realities. It could be because they have access to telephones, media etc. ***“The aspirations are high because they are connected to social media, facebook etc and seeing what other girls are doing in other parts of the country or world, and many of them understand that this is discrimination and oppression, but we can’t do much about it. So that pain was there.”***
 - Early marriage: Fear of marriage invariably emerged while girls discussed PUE as they often had to drop out after marriage to fulfill marital homes’ domestic responsibilities. Besides, in-laws usually did not allow girls to continue their education. In some focus group discussions (FGDs), girls

struggled to understand how they benefit from education, if they are not allowed to complete nor utilize this education.

- o Time used on educational preparation and paid work: Important findings:
 - Proportion of males spending 5+ hours on educational preparation was over double the female participants.
 - 8% females and 18% males spend at least 1-2 hours on paid work.
 - A striking gender gap among male and female participants- In comparison to over 12% males, only a little over 1% females spend 5 hours on paid work.
 - Participation in wage-earning sector activities among married girls was low in rural Bihar.

2. Time poverty for women and girls: These findings are important for CEQUIN and other NGOs working in this space, because many girls and women are not able to join the workforce due to this 'poverty of time'. Key findings:

- o 41% boys do not contribute to domestic work at all and about 48% spend only 1-2 hours in such work.
- o Over 54% of girls spend at least 1-2 hours and 36% spend 3-4 hours on unpaid domestic work. 5% even spend more than 5 hours on such work.
- o About 29% unmarried and 16% married boys spend 1-2 hours on sports. In comparison, only 15% of unmarried girls and 7% married girls do so.

In rural Bihar, and in most other states in the country, we are seeing a whole generation of women professionals in rural spaces- women self-help group (SHG) members and frontline workers- coming up. Although this is a wonderful development, the question is, 'Who is taking care of their domestic responsibilities?' Although there is no exact data on that, certain studies indicate that it is their adolescent daughters who are dropping out of school to do this. **So, although enrollment of girls in India is improving, the drop-out rate of girls after 8th grade is still a huge issue.**

3. Tendency to control girls and women's mobility, sexuality, and assertion of choice (TCGMSAC): Some key findings include:

- o TCGMSAC is higher among unmarried boys compared to unmarried girls.
- o A common response of girls during FGDs was that their parents pressurised them and even withdrew them from school if any girl in their school/ community eloped with a man or married a man of her choice.
- o Some parents struggled as they had **allowed their daughters to continue education on the condition that they will be good and remain pure.** However, they were worried about not withdrawing girls from

school/college. Both parents and community leaders felt that the tendency to control girls was an important trait of responsible parents.

- o Girls' presence in the digital space was also recognised as a concern by parents and community leaders.

We had questions around TCGMSAC and the assertion of patriarchal norms and ***"[i]t's shocking to share it was highest among young unmarried boys...where it was lowest was in women's collectives ...this is not only in India. Actually, globally boys are showing more regressive tendencies compared to girls."***

- **Conclusions and recommendations from the study:** Drawing from this study, as well as echoing the sentiments of the panel, some of the key recommendations include:
 - 1. Ensuring women flexible access to work opportunities near their homes.**
 - 2. Raising awareness of key schemes, and entitlements:** In addition to their implementation, concurrent efforts are needed to ensure that people are benefitting from them. Thus, there is a huge role to be played by CSOs.
 - 3. Sensitizing young boys and men:** It is time to invest in, talk to and work with boys.
 - 4. Sensitizing the community about the 'time poverty for girls'**
 - 5. Strengthening women's collectives to address social norms through gender responsive community initiatives:** Women's collectives have emerged as an important platform that has been countering/rupturing patriarchal norms that obstruct prospects of girls' and women's work participation.

Q&A Session- Panel III: The Missing Growth Story of Women in the Economy

- Lora Krishnamurthy Prabhu: ***"So ultimately, what you are saying is that education for girls is now going to be disincentivised. Are we going to have the new education policy looking at higher education?...Is there some sort of a linkage in terms of how the government is looking at skilling and education as we go forward? It would be great to get some insights from the economists on the panel."***

Dr. Anamika- *"...There was a NFHS study on desire for a third child, if they had two daughters...women with graduate degrees had more of a desire to have a third child in the hopes of having a male child as opposed to being satisfied with having two daughters. So... people are trying to fit into that conventional patriarchal model, despite being educated...The pressure to do so is very high for educated women. Secondly...in the name of women's empowerment...we are ensuring and enhancing physical representation of women... and research is showing that physical representation is not necessarily implying gender sensitisation. Because when you are at a position of power*

as a woman leader, you become a custodian of patriarchy as well. And that pressure is huge...Finally you have to operate in that rural or urban political circle where you have to play the game, as per its norms. So that is also happening at many different levels."

Bidisha Mondal: *"Women are pursuing tertiary education, but there is a huge lack of employment opportunities. Already in the formal sector, the high-skilled, high-waged sector, there is limited job growth. Within the limited opportunities if women are facing employer bias, that will ultimately disincentivise them to pursue higher education. That needs to be addressed. Also, in sectors like IT, we hear that there is less flexibility in terms of the work schedule. If women are taking career breaks due to childbirth or marriage, that is actually hampering their promotional opportunities to a large extent in these high skill, high wage sectors. So that also has to be addressed by internalizing it in the organizational policy- how to address that and bring them back, so it doesn't really affect their promotional opportunities.*

- **Participant: "Are there any studies computing the economic value of women's work at home and do you refer to that in your work and in your studies?"**

Dr. Chandrasekaran- *"You need very good 'time use data' to actually quantify women's work in the home. There was a 2019 study on this area...From the age of 14 onwards you see a divergence in the time use pattern. In terms of should you start putting a monetary value on household work, that's...an open question. At one level, the question can arise, what does one gain by putting monetary value on domestic work, instead of looking at whether they get RWS jobs, social security benefits etc. But that is not to suggest that people have not tried it, they have done some work in this area.*

Dr Manna: *"I appreciate the question. All of you will agree that the time has come to value women's work and a lot of discussions have taken place across the globe. I am aware that some neighboring countries did studies on valuing women's work. Unfortunately, as per my knowledge, in India we have not done much work in this area. ...About two to three years back the Ministry of Labour and Employment did a survey on domestic work- women and men engaging in different domestic duties such as cleaning of household premises, washing utensils etc. I was a member of the expert group of that survey. However, the results have still not been released into the public domain. Hopefully it'll be released soon and if that is there, then we can have some idea about the women engaged in the different types of domestic duties, what are their earnings and number of hours worked etc. That would give us some ground reality...I think we have a dearth of data and some initiative is required in this regard...based on the*

existing PLFS data it is difficult to have an idea about what should be the per day amount of compensation that the women should be getting, as data is very limited. However, if there is some dedicated survey like what has been done, that could be a very useful tool to translate the volume of the care economy in terms of the number of women, their time devoted to those domestic duties to some kind of valuation in the care economy and what is their share in the overall GDP. This in itself, would be a very challenging and interesting exercise.”

- Indira Pancholi, Rajasthan- *“This topic is a very important one. The high economic growth and decline in fertility rate was highlighted. So, the expectation was that there would be an increase in the number of women participating in the workforce. There was also a discussion pertaining to the challenges in this regard. More studies should come out with more details about the current women workforce. If we see in remote rural areas where we work, most of the girls have aspirations to do some sort of a job and parents also want their daughters to study and to enter the job market... A study was done by Azad Foundation, looked at girls’ job aspirations vis a vis availability of jobs... [Findings indicated that] even after working for 10 or 12 years in factories, starting at INR 6000, women could not get beyond wages of INR 7,000 -8000. We need to look at this carefully. Why is it that despite so many aspirations and so much work such as skilling being done with...girls, job opportunities are so challenging for women in this economic system? Individual success stories are great, however they won’t enable the masses to reach those heights in terms of workforce participation of women.”*
- Vibuthi Patel- *“When we talk about unpaid work being recognised...whether it is a production matter or expenditure matter, we need to have a macro level idea of what women are contributing. Then only policy makers will... treat women as those who are contributing and providing a continuous supply of the workforce. That is, at the philosophical level. Practically, after the 2019 study, there were so many judgements in lower courts, high courts, family courts and even supreme court where the husband did not want to pay any maintenance to his wife- citing that she didn’t do any work as such, she was always sickly etc.- that has changed. Because unpaid work is now a part of the module for the judges training. So, they are granting maintenance in these cases.”*

Panel Discussion IV: Kickstart Gender Equality through Sports for Development

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In a country like India, what is the prospect that sports can kickstart gender equality?

Moderator: Suheil F. Tandon, Founder and Director, Pro Sport Development:



“...I just wanted to start by setting the context a little bit...in the last 5-10 years, more and more girls have come to the fore in elite sport, in representing the country, but there is an irony when it comes to grassroots sports that doesn’t translate. Girls and women are not given the same opportunities. In the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, out of the Indian contingent that went 44% were women which is very different from what it was 20 years back. However, when I looked for some statistics on participation of girls at the grassroots...- first of all it was very hard to find these statistics- there is not much information on sports participation at the grassroots. And the gender disaggregated data is even less...50% of schools in India do not have any kind of playground. 85% of children in schools do not have access to sports and physical education...30% girls in India are insufficiently physically active and boys are more likely to meet the guidelines for being physically active than girls. This obviously points to the fact that girls do not get the opportunities to participate in sport and play. Yet, despite all these challenges we have some wonderful work happening on the ground.”

MODERATOR QUESTION: “ *How has football impacted the community and girls you work with, and perhaps your own life?* ”

Mala, Senior Coach CEQUIN and Professional Footballer

- **Sports as a confidence booster:** Sport teaches people, especially young girls, to back themselves up and reach a point where they feel that if they aspire to it, they can achieve it. *“The biggest impact of sports in my life is how it has shaped and built my confidence. From the shy girl I was as a teenager, to the point that not only am I able*

to play football proudly, but I am also able to sit here before you all and share my thoughts confidently on such an important topic, at such an important event."

- **Paying it forward:** Rolling out football programmes and other sports in communities, especially underprivileged ones, is very fulfilling. We get to see how it completely changes the lives of those it touches. These changes must be tracked over a period of time. It also becomes clear that there is a roll on effect; the girls that are helped often go on to help other girls to better their lives, as they are best placed to understand the day to day challenges and struggles faced by these girls *"...Today, I am working with many girls like myself. I was given such a wonderful opportunity by CEQUIN, so I too want to give hope to other girls and help them move forward. My teammates from CEQUIN are also helping the girls from our community now. One of them has started her own NGO, and others are coaching girls from our community for free."*
- **Impact of community football:** *"We started out as a batch of about 70 girls from Jamia learning football. Initially, it was a way to get away from our problems and take a break from our daily struggles. When we played, we just had fun and forgot about everything else."* However, over time many changes started happening. Beyond football, other life skills started to develop. *"...gradually we started voicing our opinions more and becoming more confident. We became aware that we need to take better care of our health and nutrition. Automatically while playing we learnt how to communicate better and become good team players. It led to us starting to form very close bonds of friendship, which continue to this day."* By layering the football programme with leadership and gender awareness training and providing extra educational support through non-formal education classes, CEQUIN started improving and re-shaping the girls' lives. Slowly, the girls started getting more competitive and serious about sports, studies and started to have career aspirations in football and other life ambitions and goals. *"We also started to have hope and start aspiring for a better life for ourselves."*
- **Need to stay strong and put in the work, to be able to pursue one's dreams:** In most underprivileged communities, parents' main desire is to marry off the girls as soon as possible. *"All of us football girls came from a background where we had no support at all from our families, especially with regard to a girl playing football. It was an achievement just to be able to get out of the house and reach the sports ground to play. Initially, most of us had to lie to our families, to be able to play football. I got permission to go by telling my parents that I was going for computer classes. It was only after some time that I was brave enough to talk to my parents and tell them about it and also share with them about CEQUIN and the type of work they are doing with girls in our community. Even though they permitted it, their mindset was 'it's okay let her play for now, soon she will be married off after her 12th'. However, through programmes like community football, parents and even communities can be convinced of the importance of not clipping off a girl's wings, and letting her soar. "...CEQUIN's*

coach at the time... supported us a lot and told us to 'stay strong and pursue our dreams regardless of others' wishes and you will prove to them and convince them over time' and that is what happened." Mala even went on to accept a scholarship organized by CEQUIN and Rai University to do her graduation, where she played college football. Today she is a professional football player as well as a C licensed coach. *I learnt that opportunities will come, but you need to first put in the effort and push yourself, so that when the opportunities come knocking at your door, you are ready to make the best use of it."*

MODERATOR QUESTION: " *Working in Jharkhand, what is the impact of football you are seeing in the local community?* "



Niharika Baxla , Child Development Officer, Yuwa India

- **Challenges in the initial phase of implementation:** Initially there was a lot of pushback from the girls' parents and community. *"When we started, it was very difficult. Even to get a few girls to come, my colleagues and I would have to go sit in the girls' homes for 3-4 hours trying to convince their families and they would ignore us like we don't even exist. We tried so hard to explain to them that we were doing this to help the girls grow and that in the future we would go on to start education programmes for them alongside sports".* However, they just couldn't see the value addition of playing sports for girls, but Yuwa staff kept trying because the girls themselves were excited and found ways around their parents' resistance and gradually the numbers of girls joining the sports programme started increasing. *"Slowly over time the girls started coming to us, developing a team and playing local tournaments. There was strong opposition from the community...it was impossible to find safe grounds to play. At one point it became almost impossible to run the programme- we had no support from the government, we were a new NGO so financially we were not really in a strong position to fight these problems. But the girls were so interested and determined. They even offered to give up playing football for a couple of days and help clean up the grounds, as long as we didn't stop the sports programme. In this manner, we continued to grow.* Slowly, the community mindset also shifted. *"Today we have reached a position where parents are continuously coming to us, begging us to enroll their daughters in our sports programme and we have to put them on a waiting list...and they even threaten to complain about us on social media, if we don't take their girls into our programme!"*

- **Need for adoption of different strategies by NGOs, based on learnings and involvement of men and boys in the efforts:** In order to succeed in its goal of empowerment of girls through sport, over time, Yuwa had to make changes and adopt new approaches. Initially, there was a lot of second guessing and wondering if this sports programme would work out at all. However, a huge shift took place *“[w]hen we included 20% boys into our programme, suddenly many things became so much easier for us. For instance, we used to have to struggle so much for grounds, but they became the ‘keepers of those grounds’ and our backbone. Their support of the girls’ helped the programme stay its course.*



Shaona Sen, Founder and Director, The Pass Collective

- **Need for more safe spaces to play:** Girls need more spaces to play. Giving it to them and making the spaces more accessible is the role of NGOs, organized bodies and individuals. It is only when children and youth can consistently learn in these physical spaces, that sports for development organizations can exist and have routine work. *“...there is a dependency on... spaces and it’s so uncertain for how long those spaces will last- what will be built on this land...but that is also the challenge of our work, because of course the need is there, the belief is there.”*
- **Need diverse stakeholders on board for community sports to succeed:** Organizations working in community-based interventions like sports for empowerment are well-placed to mobilize a lot of diverse stakeholders to support the work. *“In 2019, in one of our communities...we had to change the ground we were using at a NGO school, as they suddenly built a volleyball pitch in the middle of the school ground, when no one in the community plays volleyball, because there had been some CSR funding for that to happen. That forced us to move our training sessions onto a pretty rugged, open ground. At that time, the mothers of our players would finish cooking lunch [and] come to support us and informally safeguard the girls- to make sure that none of the men would create problems etc. and would step in when needed.”* There is also a need to build confidence and empower the girls themselves to a point when they can become their own advocates and stand up and claim their rights. *At one point we had to say, ‘Akka it’s okay, you don’t have to come, we need to build a routine where it is the face of the players and coaches themselves that would safeguard [them]. Now fast forward to 2024 and one of these very children [football player], she is now 22. She is an AIFF, D-licensed football coach and independently leads mixed gender sessions at that very same ground.’*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“All of you have been a part of football, used football and sport in general. Why is sport such a good medium? Why have you used sport, because there are lots of other things that organizations use and can be used? Why is sports so powerful, especially in terms of challenging gender norms?”*

Shaona Sen, Founder and Director, The Pass Collective

- **Sports brings joy:** Sports is a medium that creates a deep-rooted sense of happiness not only among girls themselves, but one that has a trickle-down effect on families and communities. Especially in the case of team sports such as football, it also creates a sense of camaraderie and bonding among these young girls, which helps them in communication and socialization. *“In the earlier panels we heard a lot about pain, pleasure and joy. The UN has defined the right to play as ‘anyone’s right to rest, recreation and leisure’ and when you think about the community work we do, just the joy of children playing and coming home. That joy then trickles into the family- the institution of decision-making. That joy converts into something deeper- a girl develops a relationship with her team, this leads to certain exposure and excellent opportunities. [Even] in certain hardships- financial, socio-economic, as a young person that joy really does go a long way.”*



Mala, Senior Coach and Professional Footballer, and Alumni of CEQUIN’s grassroots football programme for girls

- **Football is not just a game, it’s a gender equalizer:** Although it is commonly viewed as a sport for boys, football is an excellent tool for leveling the playing field. Just like boys, girls deserve such opportunities to play. Given the correct training and fitness regime, girls can also excel in such physically demanding sports. *“When we are out on that ground playing, it no longer matters if you are a boy or a girl, it just matters that you are playing and you need to perform your best. If you perform better, you get better opportunities. It’s as simple as that. I used to think that football was a game for boys as only boys have the required physical strength, stamina etc. But I learnt I was wrong. Girls too can put in that effort, build their strength and achieve anything. Football or any sport for that matter is an excellent medium to help cover the gender gap.”*
- **Football teaches many life skills:** Beyond increasing physical fitness and excellence in sport, football being a team sport, also teaches important life skills including negotiation and problem-solving, making them more attractive to employers. It also helps increase

their mobility and over time builds aspirations, and a sense of independence. ***“Football is not just a game. It teaches you how to improve and represent yourself, talk to others and it really builds your confidence. I learnt all this from playing football.”***

Niharika Baxla, Child Development Officer, Yuwa India

- **Football- a popular sport in Jharkhand:** Even previously, football was commonly played in Jharkhand, and there was even football for girls, in some rural tribal areas. However, it was not available in the area in which Yuwa started working.
- **Football- a means of getting girls out of their homes:** Unlike the boys in this community, the girls did not have any options for relaxation, hobbies and leisure. When Yuwa started its football programme, the aim was to offer the girls an opportunity for a break from their tedious, labour-intensive lives. ***“It [football] started out as a medium of fun and leisure and we just wanted to create a system for girls to simply get them out of their homes and to enable them to play and enjoy. Because the girls were always stuck inside their homes or even if we saw them outside of the home then it would be for some domestic chores- carrying heavy loads on their head and walking around listlessly. When we asked... ‘What would you all like to do for fun?’, they said ‘We wish we could play football’. So, at first, it was their choice. Later on, we saw that more girls started coming out of their homes. And it really wasn’t an expensive sport for us. With just one ball, so many girls could play. That’s how it started. And then we saw how the girls started coming out to play in such large numbers. The boys also came; however, they were not regular like the girls. That was because they had so many other options available to them, which the girls did not.”*** It was heartening to see how the girls made use of it.
- **Learnings beyond football:** It became very clear that through the football programme girls were learning so much more than just the sport. This motivated Yuwa to also use football as a tool for promoting the education of girls. ***“We saw that through football so many other things were being learnt- leadership, discipline etc. And since we wanted to provide them with a holistic and quality education programme in the future, we felt that sports and especially football was a really good platform to bring girls out and retain their interest so we continued to include sports in our programme.”***
- **Football- a tool for promoting education for girls:** There is a strong correlation between football and education. It was a key entry point for Yuwa. It also enabled the staff to interact very closely with the girls, build trust and find out what their other needs and requirements were. Once the clear need for a better education system for the girls became evident, in 2015 Yuwa opened their own school and the girls have been doing really well. The girls themselves attribute their success in studies to the discipline, life skills and learning they gained by playing football. ***“Through the football programme I***

learnt that these kids who have been going to school for almost 10 years...they were not even able to read some simple Hindi. When we delved deeper, they said 'our teachers don't come to class or when they do come, there are 300-400 students in the class and the girls are made to sit in the back and the boys in the front. So we can hardly hear what is being taught. It was then we realized that despite all our efforts to help them develop and build better lives for themselves through sport, with such an education system, there was not much hope for their future. So we decided to open a school ourselves, to at least help the girls to achieve a certain basic level of education. In 2015, we opened the school, with 45 students. Once again, it was very difficult to collect those 45 students, because we didn't have a building to act as a school premise, nor did we have formally trained teachers. However, within the first year itself we saw that the same girls who previously couldn't even read one line, were reading Hindi books comfortably and even speaking fluently in English. We also saw how they were able to make full use of the discipline developed from playing football, and apply it to their education. Unbelievably, our first batch of 10 students were all able to procure scholarships to good universities in India as well as well-known foreign universities. They set a very high standard for the rest of our girls to follow. When we asked them 'How is this possible? How did you get so motivated and achieve this?' Their simple answer was 'It was football. We learnt so much out there on the field, that we can go to any college anywhere in the world.' Today we have students at Yale and Harvard."

MODERATOR QUESTION: " *What is the role of women coaches in sports and especially in football?* "

Mala, Senior Coach and Professional Footballer, and former football player in CEQUIN's grassroots football programme for girls

- **Coaches must establish a good rapport with their players:** This is especially true in the context of women football coaches, working with girls from underprivileged and challenging communities. " *Every coach has their own style - how they develop session plans, how they organize, how they develop and maintain relationships with their players - some are very strict, others may be very friendly and sometimes they may not be able to create that environment wherein the girls feel comfortable or safe to share everything about themselves and what they are feeling. We must create that environment where, whatever community that student comes from, they feel accepted. To do this, it is important to see the context they come from like their background - what struggles they have had to face and overcome to reach there like opposition from parents, academic pressure etc.- and go beyond the duty of a coach*

and befriend them, so that they will automatically share their problems and ask for advice on solving them.”

- **Beyond technical skill development to personal growth of the players:** The coach should focus not only on creating a skilled football player, but also on guiding these girls to develop and grow as people, and motivating them to have aspirations and ambition. *“They should make their students feel that I am not only your coach...if you have an ambition of becoming an international football player, then before that you must explore how you can develop and I will help you do that.”*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“ How does the sports for development intervention, including your own interventions, link to the aspirations of girls to play at a higher level or elite level?”*

Shaona Sen, Founder and Director, The Pass Collective

- **Provides role models for girls:** These grassroots football programmes create many ‘success stories’ like talented individual players who start playing football professionally, young women who go on to get their D-license and themselves become coaches or those who get into good local colleges or go on to pursue higher education in prestigious universities abroad. There is nothing more powerful than these strong role models for girls who aspire big and want to achieve their lives’ dreams. *“I think role models like Mala are important. We need more women on the pitch. There is an identity that girls and young women really own that goes beyond one’s caste, gender, socio-economic background. The beauty of the programmes we run - they are very long-term in terms of impact- there is this consistent cycle of learning-applying. So when we have these role models- a coach or a senior player- who are accessible, in the community. There is nothing more powerful than that.”*
- **Converts boys into advocates and supporters of women and girls:** One of the key features of sports for development programmes, especially those which include boys as well, is that they become facilitators who support the girls and help them achieve their aspirations. *“ That’s the thing in mixed gender programmes as well. The boys that we are working with now, they are going to be the ones safeguarding the ground in ten years...so if a girl walks onto the ground and informally wants to play, then they will ensure that she has a safe space to do so. That is absolutely beautiful.”*

Q & A Session: Panel IV- Kickstart Gender Equality through Sports for Development

- Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu- *“Working in this space for a while, one of the challenges CEQUIN has always faced is trying to track at what level people are impacted by it. They question remains-How does one capture it and measure it? So, I just want to share our learnings and practices with everyone. At CEQUIN, we measure impact on 5 fronts:*

1. *Improved education- Girls who engage in sports, don't drop out and so they actually demonstrate better grades.*
2. *Improved health- We know that these girls are stronger and have better stamina.*
3. *Increased mobility- Girls who join our programmes, become confident to access public spaces.*
4. *Better decision making- the girls become confident to the point that they can give their opinions and negotiate.*
5. *Number of networks- typically girls don't make too many friends, but the girls in our football programme are completely different. If we ask 'Mala how many friends do you have? Then she just is at a loss because she can't count them because there are just so many people she knows.”*

- Participant- *“Two things I want to hear your opinions and thoughts on:*

1. *How to mobilize out-of-school girls or those girls not within any organized structure?*
2. *Is there a possibility to run these sports programmes for married women?*

Mala: *“You are right that it is easier to work with girls in schools and organized structures, and it is more difficult to mobilize those who are not. However, when CEQUIN started working with us we were all from different places. What they did was approach not only us, but also sit down with our parents and explain to them in detail how it would benefit the girls and enhance their future, on a one-to-one basis. So, working with the parents and getting them on board, this method may also help you.”*

Niharika Baxla: *“Just wanted to add to this. As an organization, you will have to become very strong in your monitoring and evaluation to see what type of programme you are conducting for the girls, for instance if it is development through sports, then it should be fun in order to build and retain their interest. So, you would have to make sure of this and it would automatically be easier to bring them in.”*

- Usha, Rajasthan: *“We run a sports programme for empowerment of girls in remote rural areas...I would like to hear a bit more from you all about the challenges faced.*

We are facing many issues, especially regarding the grounds. The boys who also play here do not want to release their space and if we were to do mix-gender programmes then the community would frown upon it. So, I want to hear your thoughts on challenges.

Shaona Sen: “So when we think about sports or football as a tool for enjoyment, we can say it’s a low-cost sport- there can be ten children playing with one football. In our community work ...if we look at resource investment, the truth is that if there was an opportunity for girls and women to safely and in a healthy way to reach excellence, both on and off the field, through sport, then it’s a major resource investment. We have to look at frequency of training, safety measures. If there is something we can all look at, it is how sports is used as a tool for development, say at a community level, socio-emotional level for a child but then how does that progress when a girl goes from child to youth and how excellence can be obtained. So that’s both a challenge and an opportunity.”

Mala: “I would like to add a little more about challenges. There was a recent incident when the under 19 team from Delhi went for a Khelo India tournament. Neither did the players have tickets to go nor return tickets. Only three tickets got confirmed so all 11 children were huddled next to the toilet area during the entire journey. I think the coaches, academy, or selection committee members need to pay more attention to such basic safety details. It is not the players’ responsibility.”

- Participant: ***“At the moment, your organizations are using internal coaches, but if at some point you were to hire some other coaches from outside, then how would you manage, because safety issues may arise or issues related to values may arise- we are working to provide ‘value based sport’ but these coaches may not know or understand our ultimate intents and goals and may just focus on making them ‘winners’ and shape the girls’ thinking only in that direction too. That pressure to always perform well and winning mentality being forced on them by these coaches or the girls’ own desire to win due to brainwashing, might end up placing unnecessary pressure on these girls who are already facing struggles in their daily lives. So how does one tackle such issues?”***

Niharika Baxla: “It is high time to start focusing on safeguarding and taking the issue of these girls’ safety very seriously. In my organization, ... I was the one who started the conversation rolling with regard to safeguarding. The Child Protection Policy was in place, staff were aware, some of the coaches were aware but most of the children themselves were not aware. And when we did a survey, we found out that even the girls’

families were not aware of its existence. This was a huge red flag for us. We immediately started doing intense workshops and meetings with all our students' parents. We communicated to them about the existence of our Child Protection Policy, explaining its provisions in detail, including the reporting system and process. We also told them that as per requirement we would keep updating it and sharing the new information with them. We received feedback from parents saying that they were glad to have heard all this from us as they were always worried about their children's safety when traveling for tournaments etc. So, although we had our policy in place, we had failed to share it transparently. But the moment we did, all the stakeholders were happier and our work became much easier for us. So, it's very important. "

- Dr. Mansi Mishra, CSR: ***"We run sports programmes in five districts of Haryana, and two districts of Delhi NCR. Since 2017 we are using sports as a tool for empowerment of girls, particularly to address the issue of pre-natal sex selection and we have seen remarkable results in that. Also, to address pressure and trauma, we have introduced psycho-social and mental wellbeing care for sports players, girls particularly... So, I want to know, what is the percentage of girls, that you are training under your sports programmes, who are taking up sports as a profession and what do you do exactly for that?"***

Shaona Sen: *"When we look at placements, the main interest area for employability has been coaching. Whether licensed or not, many of our young women have been getting into coaching placements. There are a lot of opportunities in more operational roles where soft skills are essential, whereas in coaching it is more about the technical skills. In our senior batch of 25 girls, we have three young women in formal, paid coaching roles while balancing it with college."*

Niharika Baxla: *"Most of the girls who come to play want to be a part of football forever, but they don't pick it as a career. Initially, some want to become coaches but only a few of them go on to pick it as a career by obtaining their license... It is difficult to say in percentages because every batch is different. All the students in our initial batch went on to become coaches. Right now, we have 36 female coaches at Yuwa, working for different teams. But professionally, as of this point, no one has taken it on as a full-time career."*

Shaona Sen: *"Also, I think there is such a lot of social stigma and opposition from parents and the family as an institution as they don't agree that sport is a viable employment opportunity- many factors such as lack of social clout, less pay etc. affect this... We have seen the value placed on formal education and how that connects to being employable*

and having employable skills. I feel that has been a big challenge, in terms of placements in the sports industry. So, as soon as we start changing the narrative it may improve.”

Mala: *“We are talking about employment, but it is more important that we realize that even the girls who are coming into this field- for instance, having got their coaching license and able to lead a team- they are not being considered for these roles, based on preconceived notions that women are not really capable of leading a team properly, in the same capacity as men. So, I think equality in this is important. Because, even after putting in so much effort and reaching that far, if girls are unable to achieve what they want, then it is inevitable that they will feel that ‘there is no use, I might as well switch fields’. As far as I am aware, very few sports organizations actually provide career counseling.”* Even after a young woman picks a career in sport, her parents still have their doubts and question her choices, in turn, making her second-guess herself. ***“Parents feel, ‘What is the scope in sports? If you are playing, you will only be able to do it for a short time because after a certain age you will have to leave sports, so what will you do then?’”***

- Suresh, Alakhpura FC, Haryana: ***“We have 300 girls per day practicing football on our grounds and over 30 of them, having played football with us, are now in government jobs with the Haryana Sports Department, railways, SSB etc. I truly believe that there are still opportunities for women in sports. The village I come from, where we mainly engage in agriculture, the women are much stronger than the men, due to the intensive labour work they do in the fields...We have male coaches, but we are not afraid of it, because we have empowered our girls so much and taught them that if a male coach was to touch you, you must analyze for yourself, ‘In which manner is he doing so? With what intentions? [If you are uncomfortable or unsure] you have to tell your other coaches or your mother or father.’ Thus, we have made them strong enough to stand up for themselves and speak up for themselves. Many of our girls are in the state and national teams, so whenever our girls have to travel for matches...we empower them and teach them about their safety saying, ‘There are 18 of you, if anyone does or says anything inappropriate...stand together and for each other and no one will dare to touch you.”***

Moderator: ***“I think it’s hard to wrap up when there is so much to talk about, but I think one thing is clear and that is that sport, in particular football, can have an enormous impact on girls and young women. It can also have an impact on the allied stakeholders- the parents, the brothers, the boys who study with the girls etc. It needs to be done on a long-term basis...impact doesn’t happen in a year or two, it takes some time. Also, though sport is low***

cost, there is a lot of energy and resources that go at the back end, to do what they are doing, because it is not so simple and easy.

Many asked, 'How can sports be linked with a larger goal?' Yes, at some point, all girls want to play professionally and we should look at that, but what is the back-up option? There was the suggestion of coaching. One thing I have clearly seen today is that sport inspires. You are all so engaged, because somewhere sport is very inspiring to you. It is a relatively new concept, especially in the development sector, so as to say. I think we need to have more conversations around what we're all doing...how can we work with each other? That is very important. We have all been trying so hard to measure the change, so why don't we all come together to do it? Let's not just leave it on CEQUIN to call us every year or two years to have this conversation. I think let all of us find spaces, it is not required for everyone to meet physically, it can even happen online, it can be smaller groups- it doesn't have to be 100 or even 50 of us- whenever and wherever we get the opportunity let us take this conversation forward. There is a lot of value to that."

Panel Discussion V: Me to We- Stories of Grassroots Leadership from CEQUIN's Changemakers

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We have seen these faces in the videos shown through the day. They are from CEQUIN's extended family who we have nurtured and worked with for a long time. They are the true changemakers... role models leading the change in their communities. Let us listen to their inspirational stories...

Moderator: Naseem Khan, Manager Programmes and Implementation, CEQUIN



MODERATOR QUESTION: *“Antima, how did you get involved in sports and how have you reached where you are today? Please share your story with us.*”

Antima, Footballer, CEQUIN’s Kickstart Equality Sports Programme, Seemapuri, Delhi

ANTIMA’S JOURNEY...

“I am a 10th standard student. Because of the unsafe and challenging environment I live in - in Seemapuri, Delhi, my parents never let me step out of the house except for school. People in our community would also make negative remarks about us if they saw us outside. They felt that it was unnecessary for girls to step out of the home as we could never achieve anything beyond domestic duties. My situation at home was also very unstable. My father was very ill and we were struggling financially, so we opened up a little vegetable shop. I used to have to sit at the shop and sell vegetables every day. I then joined CEQUIN’s sports programme, because Anjali didi and Shivangi didi came and convinced me to join it saying that I would only have to spend about an hour to reach the grounds and I could get to play football there, for free. They spoke to my mother and worked hard to convince her saying that if she allowed me, I could achieve great things in the future. They also approached many of my friends’ parents, but their parents were not convinced. They came again and again and finally my mother was convinced and she sent me for the sessions. I was so excited and took part with all my heart and soul and did my best. Soon, I got selected to represent CEQUIN in tournaments. Infact, recently I took part in a Goals for Girls workshop in Mumbai. I learnt so much about leadership and other skills there. When I returned to my community, I taught all that I had learnt to the other girls in the community. Suddenly the community’s perception seemed to change. From people who frowned down on me and my parents saying, ‘This girl wears short shorts and plays football in grounds and public parks’, were now saying, ‘See she is doing something with her life’ and they were happy for their daughters to associate with me. They feel that I will be able to achieve something now and even in the future and that I will help their daughters too. I feel happy about this.”



Moderator: *“With regard to the park you play in, now, when you play football in the park, do you feel unsafe or does your mother feel worried and scared for your safety?”*

Antima: *“No, earlier there were a lot of drug addicts and drunkards hanging around in that park, but now the environment there has completely changed because our women coaches have driven them out from there and so we feel very protected and safe. Also, earlier the walls enclosing the ground were broken but that got fixed and the park also got cleared up and cleaned. Now, since we claimed this park, it is being maintained properly and these unsuitable people don’t come there*

anymore. The 'uncle' [caretaker of the park] also keeps an eye out for our safety. Now there is also a CCTV camera installed there, so we feel even safer."

Moderator: " *CEQUIN adopted this park in Seemapuri, that Antima is referring to, as a strategy and did a lot of work towards its maintenance. We also worked with the local police with regard to the issue of its safety. So, access to this park is now with the police who are keeping an eye on this park. CEQUIN is maintaining a good rapport with the local community management committee, responsible for the upkeep of the park, to encourage them to ensure that it is maintained well. We have also volunteered and become a member of this management committee so we can stay apprised.*"

MODERATOR QUESTION: " *Moin joined CEQUIN's programme when we were working in Alwar, Rajasthan. Please share your story with us.*"

Moin Khan, Agents of Change from Alwar, Rajasthan

Moin's Journey...

"I am Moin Khan from a small village called Guwalda in the Alwar district, in Rajasthan. I come from a family of 10 people- three brothers and five sisters and our parents, and I am the oldest child. My father is the only one earning in our family. Sadly, one of my younger brothers met with an accident while going to school and as a result we have had to do 5 operations for him already and we are now preparing for his 6th operation. So, we are struggling a lot financially, because all the money my dad earns is going into medical bills and care and we have nothing left for the household. Yet, even with all these struggles and worries, I still managed to complete my education at the local government school and now I am studying in the final year at a Government college and alongside that I am completing my JBT [Junior Basic Training]. I am also doing a part time job at the Guwalda school so that I can contribute something to the household income and take care of my own as well as my siblings' educational expenses at least, as my dad's income cannot cover that as well.

It was when I was still studying in the 10th class, that CEQUIN came to our village. At that time, I would cut school, lie to my parents and waste my time hanging out with my friends in the local hangouts, but my heart was not really in it. CEQUIN did sessions on leadership with us during which they also taught us about gender discrimination, GBV, positive masculinity and need for sensitised leaders. At that point I was very interested in these sessions and when they started a leadership club in the school in 2019 I immediately joined it. CEQUIN told us that, 'It is only if you study hard and put in effort that you will be able to make something of your life.' I took that teaching very seriously and didn't look back after that. I was able to top in my school in 10th. In 11th there was a district level exam and I topped that too, and in 12th I topped again and became the school topper. This was just one of the important learnings I took from CEQUIN.

Moderator: *“To come here today, you had to take a leave from your teaching job in the school. Could you briefly share with us your colleagues’ reactions?”*



Moin Khan: *“When I told them...they asked why I needed the leave, and I told them that it was for an important national level programme in Delhi held by CEQUIN. They were all congratulating me... Some of them even asked me to share the link of the live feed of this event and even now they are messaging me asking how it is going and telling me to make them all proud and to make the entire village proud by speaking well. They are all so proud that a boy from such a small village has been selected to speak at such an important event on such a big stage.”*

MODERATOR QUESTION: *“ Shabnam’s story is also equally inspiring. Please share your story with us...”*

Shabnam, Member, Women’s Collective, Jamia Nagar, Delhi

Shabnam’s Journey...

“My name is Shabnam. I am a regular person, from a regular family. I was married off at young age, when I was studying in my 12th, by my parents. No one asked me what I wanted. I went on to have two children very early on, and like many other women in my community, I lived a life restricted to the four walls of my house. One day I chanced upon a member of the CEQUIN team and heard about the programmes run by CEQUIN for women in the community. I was curious, so I went to the CEQUIN office. There I learnt that they held many types of skilling classes for women- sewing, beauty therapy courses, craft etc. I joined all of them and worked hard to skill myself, so that I would be able to stand on my own two feet, in the future. I always felt very supported by the CEQUIN team who started procuring crochet work for me, through which I was able to earn money. I even received a trophy from CEQUIN for my hard work. Seeing this trophy, made my parents so happy. It was clear that they regretted their past actions and that they felt proud of me. They said ‘We did wrong by you, marrying you off so young, but look where you have reached now, all based on your own efforts’.

Then I joined CEQUIN’s Mahila Panchayat programme, underwent the intensive training they provided and became a Mahila Panchayat member. Soon, people from my community started coming to me to solve their domestic violence (DV) cases. I felt so good that I was able to help by giving the right kind of counselling and onward referrals. I also started building awareness among the community women regarding GBV, DV, their rights and the importance of raising their voices against violence.

Today, I am working as an ASHA [Accredited Social Health Activist] worker. I use this role to also counsel the local women and advise them to stop marrying off their daughters while they are still so young and instead let

them study further. I cite my own daughter as an example- 'I encouraged my daughter to do a teacher training course and today she is a teacher and reading for her Master's degree at the same time- If a mother supports, roots for and raises her voice for her daughter, undoubtedly that daughter will go far in life'. Earlier I was very afraid of everything. I did not dare step out of my home...even in the daytime I would keep all the doors and windows locked. Today, I am not afraid of anything. I can do anything and go anywhere, at any time. Nothing can stop me now and my lack of confidence and mobility is a thing of the past."



Moderator: *" Shabnam's message is loud and clear. She highlights the importance of a mother's support to help a girl grow and reach her goals in life. Moin showed us the important role played by boys and men- brothers and fathers - in changing the narrative and supporting a girl's journey towards success. And Antima is the epitome of an empowered adolescent girl who, given a little support and guidance, can move mountains. This is completely in keeping with the CEQUIN model of adopting a holistic approach to bring change in communities.*

Q&A Session- Panel V: Me to We- Stories of Grassroots Leadership from CEQUIN's Changemakers

- **Participant-** ***"We mostly work with girls, and have been unable to work in a focused manner with boys. Thus, we've only been able to get very few boys on board. What are your thoughts on how best to engage boys?"***

Naseem:

- o **Retain their interest:** *"It is important to point out that the challenges relating to girls and boys are very different. When boys first attend our camps and sessions, they enjoy it a lot."* This is mainly because the sessions don't start off by delving deep into gender and discrimination etc., instead the focus is on the aspect of leadership and the importance of becoming a sensitized leader. From there, the conversation is slowly moved to discrimination and stereotyping that both they and the girls face within their communities and families and then finally through interactive activities it

is connected with gender, patriarchy and the need for positive masculinity. With the girls the sessions directly start with gender discrimination and the issues they face and how they can overcome them, because they can immediately make the association between what is being said and their daily, lived realities. *“This method has worked well and the participants have been able to enjoy and connect well with the training. If we conduct an initial session with around 100 boys, then we identify at least 50 of them and continue to engage with them through follow up sessions, workshops and activities. Thus, we are able to retain these boys. The reason these boys do not lose interest in our interventions, “...is mainly because usually, no one bothers to place the facts before them in a subtle way and connect it for them, Because we do that, they are able to see for themselves what patriarchal communities they live in and how it has shaped their notions. So the change and shift in them becomes huge.”*

- o **Social Action and Change:** *“For girls, we simply need to increase their awareness and knowledge and provide them with the tools to seek out inspiration. Then, they are well on their way. However the key stakeholders in bringing about change are the boys. So, we encourage them to advocate for the girls, taking on the onus by organizing and leading awareness road shows, public meetings and rallies etc.*
- **Jalaluddin-** *“As mentioned by Moin, there is a high prevalence of early marriage in his community. That is also the case in certain areas in Delhi. So it is when boys like Moin will raise their voices against it, that some changes will happen.”*
- **Participant:** *“Moin, when you decided to refuse an early marriage, study further and also educate your sister, you did two huge things. One is to break societal stereotypes and expectations and the second was breaking gender expectations. When you shared these types of thoughts with your peer group of friends did they support you or did they make fun of you or bully you and how did you handle it?”*

Moin Khan: *“Initially, when they thought I was getting married, they were happy and excited for me. But I told them, ‘I am not planning on marrying, I am planning on studying further and you should also do the same and try to achieve your dreams. Why rush into marriage so young?’ They then said, ‘This has always been done in our community, so why not do it now?’ So I explained to them, ‘... it is our generation that will have to take the first step and create a change, to make a better life for ourselves. Some of them got it and they went on to spread the message onward. This is the process it takes to make change, one step at a time. Further, by changing myself and setting an example, it also made others feel, ‘if he can do it, why can’t I?’ This too is a powerful tool, leading by example.”*

Closing Plenary- Towards a Gender Equitable Future

“We have had a wonderful day full of enriching conversations. Today was about gaining knowledge and learning, subscribing to the fact that gender is a cross-cutting issue...We wanted to hear from people from across different states...working in different areas where maybe the focus is not just on football. It was about bridging that gender gap and making the conversation so wide...that it becomes a part of every conversation...I hope that today we demonstrated that to some extent... Our CEQUIN model is something we took our time over, to get that finer detail of it. To be very pleased and proud of something that we want to now share...We want to see if we can work and partner with every one of your organisations...we do have 15 years of experience and we thought that this was a very wonderful time to celebrate that, and to celebrate that with you all sitting over here- 40 delegates who have come from all across India- and we hope that today’s conversations will enrich your work and help you all think a little bit differently. We wanted to create those sparks. We hope that our 15 years of experience will be enriching for all attending the event today.” - Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN



CHIEF GUEST: Shombi Sharp, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India

- **Congratulations to CEQUIN:** Impressive work has been done by CEQUIN over the last 15 years and the use of sports as an entry point is an exciting approach. CEQUIN has thus provided women and girls with an excellent platform to excel.
- **Much work left to be done:** Sadly, 2024 has brought with it the same basket of challenges as 2023. *“...It’s up to maybe 300 years, at the current pace of things, before globally we will get to the point in which discriminatory laws and all of the different gaps that were mentioned have been closed. And nobody has 300 years for sure...there is a lot to be distressed about and rightly so.”*

- **Yet, there is still hope and time to reverse things:** SDGs is the agreed pathway at global level. Investment in women and girl's development is a great return on investment-unleashing the power of gender equality is the key. ***"But there is also good news, and I like to talk about that and that is that we can still reverse the course, there is still time and we know what to do and there are some core truth to guide us forward...we take the sustainable development goals (SDGs) ...as the agreed pathway at the global level and within that we know that investing in gender equality and women's empowerment is the single greatest multiplier that we have... to achieve the aspirations of all of us equally, not just women and girls...nations...As the UN Secretary General said,... 'Unleashing the power of gender equality is the unfinished business of our time'."***



- **Gender equality and women's empowerment are core human rights:** It is the right of every human being. It is also about smart economics. A fair playing field is a must to enable the full capability of communities, and this is the path to allow us to achieve our capacities.

- **Engagement of men and boys is a must:** Gender equality is not just a women's issue it concerns us all. That is why it is important to involve the men and boys and have them on board. We must achieve parity. When we

achieve parity the value of your contribution as a man/boy increases. This is about gains and wins.

- **The need for more women in parliament:** The more women that there are in leadership roles, and public administration positions, governments tend to be more responsive and accountable, corruption goes down, public services improve, and it leads to more investment in peacemaking, better climate action etc.
- **Sports an important entry point:** Increase in Indian women athletes now but we need to get to a point where there is no more discrepancy in opportunities for boys and girls. ***"It [sport] is an important entry point to so many different things...for too long, this entry point has been denied in countries across the world...largely... to women and girls."***

"...I am so encouraged to see so much leadership, young women, girls and men and boys who are really understanding these important points, and organizations like CEQUIN who are opening so many more opportunities and bringing everybody along on this 'jan andolan' [mass movement]...The United Nations is a committed partner for you in this all important

endeavor...Together, we can make gender equality a reality. It requires partnerships..."- Shombi Sharp, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India

Closing Remarks



"...A wonderful way to wrap up the entire day, emphasizing all those complex problems that face us...I think we need a different kind of politics. I think we need a gender perspective...We've just had a woman present the budget a few days back. We are sitting here in the heart of New Delhi, people from across the country deliberating absolutely critical issues of political participation, workforce participation, wonderful conversations around gender in media etc...Today has seen many enriching conversations and a lot of complexities have come out. We've looked at the data and tried to make sense of the data that shows that,

while we have more girls in education than ever before, there is still a fall in the women's labor force participation rate. What was really frightening to know was that the higher the education, the less likely women were to join the workforce. So, there were many things for us to ponder over today. ...It was a great space for us all to listen to each other and that was a key purpose served today. I think we are all taking away a lot of food for thought and it is a great starting point to initiate more conversations. I want to thank all our panelists...and participants and many of our partners who have supported us right from the outset, on a 15-year journey. As Sara said, we took our time and along the way there have been a lot of learnings...and we feel very strongly that all we do will just be a drop in the ocean unless we all come together and collaborate better..."- Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Co-founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

The Symposium at a Glance



"Lora and Sara, a heartfelt thank you to you both. It is a great honour to be here on behalf of the UN in India...It is such an honour to participate in a 15 anniversary celebration of CEQUIN having become such a leading light for gender equality in India, for having produced 1000 of agents of change...and for really addressing the critical entry points...using sports as an entry point for many many other issues and providing platforms for women and girls to excel..." ~ **Shombi Sharp, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India**

"I really want to celebrate CEQUIN today. It's been 15 years, and it's not a joke, especially in today's environment...I hope we get to celebrate another 15 years soon, and that I am here for that too." ~ **Padmapriya Janakiraman, Actress and Co-founder, WCC**

"Congratulations to CEQUIN for completing 15 years of meaningful work. I have seen organisations which don't do anything but have very impressive visibility. Here so much is happening at the ground level, but so silently that even a person like me who has been in the women's movement for 47 years didn't know that such excellent work has been happening. So heartfelt congratulations to you." ~ **Prof. Vibhuti Patel, Vice President, Indian Association for Women's Studies**

"I would like to start by thanking CEQUIN- Sara Pilot, Lora and the entire team- for the excellent work that you all have done in the last 15 years." ~ **Sushmita Dev, Former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, West Bengal, All India Trinamool Congress**

"...Congratulations to CEQUIN on 15 years...CEQUIN has been one of the early movers in the sports for development space and has been an inspiration for many of us. Not just their work on the ground, I think they have given avenues to discuss what's been happening because a lot of us are busy working on the ground but can't share our stories. So they have given an avenue for that. So, hats off to Lora and Sara for that and congratulations once again to the entire team." ~ **Suheil F. Tandon, Founder and Director, Pro Sport Development**

"I wanted to start by congratulating CEQUIN and Lora and Sara on 15 years of doing incredible work. My mother also ran an NGO in Bangalore and I know how much effort goes into it and how much it takes to make change on the ground. 15 years is a long time." ~ **Raghu Karnad, Independent Journalist and Writer**

"Congratulations once again to CEQUIN on their 15th and thank you for having us here and for having these wonderful deliberations to celebrate your 15th." ~ **Dr Anamika Priyadarshini, Senior Specialist, Research, Centre for Catalyzing Change, India**

"Thank you CEQUIN team for having us. It was great deliberation and got to know many things and the intense journey of CEQUIN. Congratulations for big 15 and many more to come. Looking forward to a shared journey." ~ **Sneha Mishra, AINA-Odisha**

"Thanks for inviting to this enriching symposium.all the sessions were so intense in terms of knowledge. Many new perspectives i got specially the idea to use the sports as a tool for young girls empowerment. Would definitely love to know more about the challenges n coping mechanisms from CEQUIN team.. it was nice meeting all young and energetic minds... More strength to you all at the organisation ... to us too....Best." ~ **Sophia, SAFAR, Gujarat**

"Thank you CEQUIN team. It was very nice meeting to all the friends and learn a lot. A big and warm congratulations to CEQUIN. Yes, let's continue this journey of learning and sharing. Together we will make a difference and work for gender justice." ~ **Yogesh, Rajasthan**

"Congratulations to team CEQUIN again. It was an absolute pleasure being able to meet you all in Delhi and celebrate with all of you. It was lovely meeting old friends and connecting with new ones. Thoroughly enjoyed the thought-provoking panel discussions." ~ **Amrita, Kolkata**



**HAPPY 15th
ANNIVERSARY
CEQUIN!**

2009



2024

ANNEXURES

‘Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’

AGENDA

 5th February 2024



India International Centre, Multipurpose Hall, Kamala Devi Complex , Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110003

 9:15 am to 5:00 pm

9:00 - 9:15 AM

Registration

9:15 - 10:00 AM

Opening Plenary : Welcome & Introduction

By Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN
And Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Co-founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

With Chief Guests

Supriya Sule, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Baramati, Nationalist Congress Party

Padmapriya Janakiraman , Indian Actress & Co-founder Women in Cinema

10:00 - 11:00 AM

Panel discussion : On the Frontline - Women in Political Leadership

Moderated by

Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Co-founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

With Panelists

Prof. Vibhuti Patel, Vice President, Indian Association for Women's Studies

Nandita Baruah , Country Representative-India , The Asia foundation

Sushmita Dev , Former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, West Bengal, All India Trinamool Congress

Tara Krishnaswamy , Co-founder, Political Shakti

11:00 - 11:15 AM

Tea break

11:15 AM - 12:15 PM

Panel Discussion : The Role of Media in Building Narratives for Gender Justice

Moderated by

Raghu Karnad, Independent Journalist & Writer

With Panelists

Namita Bhandare, Independent Journalist & Writer

Shaili Chopra, Founder, SheThePeople & Gytrees.com

Revati Laul, Independent Journalist & Film-maker

Sapna Kedia , Assistant Director, Gender - Social Development, International Center for Research on Women

12:15 - 1:15 PM

Panel discussion : The Missing Growth Story of Women in the Economy

Moderated by

Prof S. Chandrasekhar , Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research

With Panelists

Dr Gurucharan Manna , Senior Advisor, National Council of Applied Economic Research

Dr Anamika Priyadarshini, Senior Specialist, Research, Centre for Catalyzing Change India

Bidisha Mondal, Research fellow, IWWAGE - an initiative of LEAD at Krea University

1:15 - 2:30 PM

Lunch

2:30 - 3:30 PM

Panel discussion : Kickstart Gender Equality through Sports for Development

Moderated by

Suheil F. Tandon, Founder & Director, Pro Sport Development

With Panelists

Sadam Hanjabam, Founder & CEO, YA_All

Shaona Sen, Founder & Director , The Pass Collective

Niharika Baxla , Child Development Officer, Yuwa India

Mala, Senior Coach & Professional Footballer, CEQUIN

3:30 - 4:15 PM

Panel Discussion : Me to We - Stories of Grassroots Leadership from CEQUIN's Changemakers

Moderated by

Naseem Khan, Manager Programmes & Implementation, CEQUIN

With Panelists

Shabnam, Member, Women's Collective, Jamia Nagar, Delhi

Moin Khan, Agents of Change, Alwar, Rajasthan

Antima, Footballer, Kickstart Equality, Seemapuri, Delhi

4:15 - 5:00 PM

Closing Plenary - Towards a Gender Equitable Future

By Sara Abdullah Pilot, Co-founder and Chairperson, CEQUIN

And Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Co-founder and Managing Director, CEQUIN

With Chief Guests

Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Bathinda, Shiromani Akali Dal Party

Shombi Sharp, United Nations Resident Coordinator in India

5:00 Onwards

Tea & Refreshments



:Cequinindia



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‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
SPEAKER PROFILES

Chief Guests



Harsimrat Kaur Badal
Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Bathinda
Shiromani Akali Dal Party

Harsimrat Kaur Badal is a three-term Member of Parliament representing Bathinda, from the Shiromani Akali Dal Party. She is a former Union Cabinet Minister of Food Processing Industries in the Government of India. Known for her multifaceted contributions as a social reformer, philanthropist, and politician, before embarking on her political career, she started the Nanhi Chhaan project to address critical issues like female foeticide, women empowerment, and environmental preservation.



Supriya Sule
Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, Baramati
National Congress Party (NCP)

Supriya Sule is a Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha representing Baramati, from the Nationalist Congress Party. She was first elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2006, followed by three consecutive terms in 2009, 2014 & 2019 as a Member of Parliament in Lok Sabha. Vocal about many people's issues, In 2011, she launched a state-wide campaign against female foeticide. Recently, she has also been honored with Mumbai Women of the Decade Achievers Award by All Ladies League for social service.



Shombi Sharp
United Nations Resident Coordinator in India

Shombi Sharp is the UN Resident Coordinator for India since November 2021. He has devoted more than 25 years of his career to promoting inclusive and sustainable development internationally. He has held several leadership positions at the UNDP, across Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon, Europe, Russian Federation. Prior to joining the UN, Mr. Sharp began his career in development with the international non-profit CARE International in Zimbabwe. He is a published author of works in health economics and was a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) “ Policy Champion” as well as a nominee for the UNDP Administrator's Award.



Padmapriya Janakiraman
Indian Actress & Co-founder Women in Cinema

Padmapriya is an actor working for the past 15 years in the Indian film industry with main lead credits in more than 50 films across 6 languages. She has won the President of India's medal for acting and her films have traveled to international festivals like Venice and Toronto. Trained in business administration in India and public policy at New York University, she has worked in the arts, private and not for profit sectors. She founded Collective Crew, a media and entertainment start-up driven by diversity and focussed on producing content that is women-centered and sourced primarily from Indian literature. She is the founding member of the Women in Cinema Collective and that works towards creating equal space and opportunities for women in cinema.



Sara Abdullah Pilot
Co-founder & Chairperson, CEQUIN

Sara Abdullah Pilot is the Chairperson and Co-Founder of CEQUIN. She has over 20 years of experience in the development sector at both grassroots and management levels, with roles like strategy level planning, fundraising, overall programme management, networking and partnership building. Previously she has worked with UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), specializing in gender budgeting. She was also the Chairperson of the Women's committee in the All India Football Federation (AIFF) from 2014-2022 and co-founded the National Alliance for Women's Football in 2018. She's received awards like Women of the Decade in Community Leadership at Women Economic Forum 2019, Indian Women Achievers Award (2013) by Tag Heuer, ASSOCHAM Ladies League Award to Prominent Women in India (2014) which resulted in the Sara Pilot Scholarship by Rai University.

‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
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Panel 1 : On the Frontline - Women in Political Leadership



Moderator
Lora Kirshnamurthi Prabhu
Co-founder & Managing Director CEQUIN

Lora is the Managing Director and Co-Founder of the CEQUIN. Prior to that, she was associated with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and has 25 years of work experience, having worked as a researcher, journalist, film maker and development professional. She served as a member of the working group on women empowerment for the 12th Five Year Plan of the Government of India. She has co-edited ‘Fear that Stalks: Gender Based Violence in Public Spaces’, published by Zubaan Books 2012. Ms Prabhu served as board member of the Central Board for Film Certification (CBFC) from 2011-14 and has been a member of the Sexual Harassment Committee in public and private sector firms. She is the co-convenor of the National Alliance for Women’s Football in India.



Sushmita Dev
Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha , West Bengal
All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC)

Sushmita Dev is a former Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha from West Bengal (2021-2023) and belongs to the All India Trinamool Congress. Previously, she was also elected to the Lok Sabha, lower house of the Parliament of India from Silchar, Assam in 2014. She is the former president of the All India Mahila Congress (2017-2021). She currently serves as the national spokesperson of the All India Trinamool Congress. As a trained lawyer, she has practiced at the Delhi and Supreme Court of India, and has been a member of various Parliamentary Committees on Empowerment of Women and Children, Environment, Technology and Science.



Prof. Vibhuti Patel
Vice President , Indian Association for Women's Studies

Prof. Vibhuti Patel is Vice President of Indian Association for Women's Studies. She retired from Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Prior to that she was Prof. and head of post graduate Economics Department of SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. She has been actively involved in the women's rights movement of India since the 1970s, at the intersection of gender, development and social justice. She is a trustee of VACHA, Anusandhan Trust, Institute of Community Research Organisation, and Population First in Mumbai. She is a Governing Board member of WomenPowerConnect, Delhi.



Nandita Baruah
Country Representative , The Asia Foundation

Nandita Baruah has over 30 years of experience, having served in Nepal, Cambodia, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and India and in providing technical support to programs across South East Asia. . She has worked with multilateral and bilateral agencies, such as UNODC, UN Women, CIDA, and USAID, heading national and regional programs. Her expertise includes gender equity and women’s empowerment, urban governance, regional trade, water governance, migration and mobility, and human trafficking.



Tara Krishnaswamy
Co-founder, Political Shakti

Tara Krishnaswamy is political consultant, gender and civic activist and a Cannes Gold winner for campaigns. She has run election and communication campaigns for over a decade across Karnataka, Andhra, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and UP. She is co-founder of the citizens collectives - Political Shakti for women’s political representation and Citizens for Bengaluru for decentralized urban governance and sustainable mobility. Her campaign team won the Cannes Social Impact Gold and 2 Silvers for the Bihar election campaign. She is on the advisory board of Indian School of Democracy and Indus Action. She is an author across national newspapers, teaches political mobilization and public policy and is a TEDx speaker.

‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
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Panel 2 : The Role of Media in Building Narratives for Gender Justice



Moderator
Raghu Karnad
Independent Journalist & Writer

Raghu Karnad is a journalist and writer, and a recipient of Yale's Windham Campbell Prize for non-fiction. He was part of the founding team of the Wire.in, where he was Chief Of Bureau in 2019. He also works in video and podcasts.



Namita Bhandare
Independent Journalist & Writer

Namita Bhandare is an award-winning journalist with nearly 30 years of reporting experience for various publications including magazines Sunday and India Today, and The Hindustan Times. In 2013, she was appointed India's first gender editor for Mint newspaper and She writes a fortnightly column for Hindustan Times as well as a weekly gender newsletter, Mind the Gap. She is a founding editor of the website, Article-14. She has focussed entirely on writing on gender issues from workplace gaps, the digital economy, health, law and justice, the intersections of gender with caste and socio-economic status, and sexual violence.



Revati Laul
Independent Journalist & Film-maker

Revati Laul is an independent journalist and rights activist who lives and works in the north Indian district of Shamli, Uttar Pradesh. She started her career as a television journalist when it wasn't cool to be on TV and left for the world of print a decade and a half later when it wasn't cool to leave. In short, everything she does, including this book, is counter-intuitive. She worked for over a decade in NDTV, then at Tehelka magazine and after, has been writing for various publications from The Quint to the Hindustan Times and India Spend. She is most inspired when peering into spaces of violence, rupture and dysfunction since they mirror her own inner world best.



Shaili Chopra
Founder, ShethePeople & Gytree.com

Shaili Chopra is the founder of the digital platform - SheThePeople. TV , passionately championing stories of women and their real efforts across India. The journalist turned entrepreneur is an Aspen Fellow and also holds the honour of receiving India's biggest journalism award, the Ram Nath Goenka Award for Journalism. She has authored five books and was announced one of India's Top 50 Most Influential Women in Media, Marketing and Advertising by Impact Magazine, and 40 Under 40 among digital content creators.



Sapna Kedia
Assistant Director, Gender & Social Development, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

Sapna Kedia works as an Assistant Director- Gender and Social Development at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Asia Office. At ICRW, Sapna leads and supports research and programs on the issues of men and masculinities, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender, governance and public policy. She is an avid follower of Bollywood, and looks at the medium with cynicism but also a lot of hope.

‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
SPEAKER PROFILES

Panel 3 : The Missing Growth Story of Women in the Economy



Moderator
Prof S Chandrasekhar
Indira Gandhi Institute of Development & Research (IGIDR)

S Chandrasekhar, an alumnus of Delhi School of Economics and Pennsylvania State University, is Professor at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai. He has worked extensively on issues related to the labour market and internal migration in India. He has a keen interest in improving data standards and data quality.



Dr Guruchan Manna
Senior Advisor, National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)

Gurucharan Manna is a Senior Adviser at NCAER. He was the Director General of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) in the Government of India. He has nearly 40 years of specialized experience in sample design, estimation procedures for household and establishment surveys, and the design of survey questionnaires and related documents for fieldwork and data validation. He is also a member of the Reconstituted Expert Group on Minimum Wages and National Floor Wages constituted by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and of the Labour Bureau’s Expert Group for All-India Surveys.



Dr Anamika Priyadarshini
Senior Specialist, Research, Centre for Catalyzing Change India

Dr Anamika Priyadarshini is associated with Centre for Catalyzing Change(C3). She specializes in gender and development. Anamika is recipient of awards like Margaret McNamara Fellowship, Ford Foundation Fellowship, SUNY’s Doctoral and College Fellowship. She has published articles in journals like eClinicalMedicine-The Lancet, Brill, Social Change, Mainstream, Economic & Political Weekly.



Bidisha Mondal
Researcher, Institute for What Works to Advance Gender Equality IWWAGE (Lead at Krea University)

Bidisha has worked extensively in various dimensions of socio-economic inequalities. Her core research interests lie in analyzing gender gap and discrimination faced by marginalized social categories in the Indian labour market. Her doctoral study looks into various kinds of labour market segmentation in the Indian manufacturing sector. Before joining IWWAGE, she has worked with National Institute of Public Finance and Policy for more than four years. Her research works got published in many peer-reviewed journals of national and international repute.

‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
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Panel 4 : Kickstart Gender Equality through Sports for Development



Moderator
Suheil F Tandon
Founder & Director, Pro Sports Development

Suheil F. Tandon is the Director-Founder of Pro Sport Development, an award-winning social enterprise dedicated to leveraging sport, physical activity and play to provide better futures for young people. Suheil specializes in the sport for development field, with more than 12 years of global experience, and has a professional background in sports management and coaching. Suheil is passionate about creating an ecosystem where the power of sport, physical activity and play are used to catalyze social transformation.



Shaona Sen
Co-founder & Director, Pass Collective , Bangalore

Shaona Sen is a Bangalore based Sports for Development practitioner. She is the Founder and Director of Pass Collective & Shining Stars Football Club (SSFC). Her journey of designing systems driven by the power of play is grounded by her balance of immersive field and management experience. She was part of the core team to organize Karnataka's first ever Women's State Football League under the All India Football Federation and Karnataka State Football Association, leading to Bangalore's first club representing in the Hero IWL 2019. She has twelve years of cross-cultural experience in design, sport and development sectors between India and USA.



Sadam Hanjabam
Founder & CEO , Ya_All, Manipur

Sadam Hanjabam is the Founder of Ya_All , Northeast India's first registered queer and youth-led-focused organization based in Imphal. He is also the curator of Asia's first all Transmen Football Team. He was the only queer person to be awarded The Better India's Covid Warrior Award in 2020 and Ya_All was listed among 10 Global Initiatives led by queer people fighting an inclusive fight around the globe by United Nations Envoy on Youth. He was acknowledged by Dettol among 100 Protectors recently and his story has been documented by Apple TV in a docu-series called The Me You Can't See co-produced by Oprah Winfrey and he was recently featured in another docuseries Rainbow Rishta on Amazon Prime. He is also a TEDx Speaker.



Niharika Baxla
Senior Coach & Child Development Officer, Yuwa India, Jharkhand

Pioneering girls' empowerment advocate, Niharika drives change through advocacy on education and Sports. With a background in Computer science, she joined NGO Yuwa-India, sparking a movement that empowers girls in Jharkhand and all around the world. Working for Sports and Development since the last 13 years she has been involved in several international collaborations for sports for development and has successfully aimed to provide easy access to sports for women in and around the community.



Mala
Senior Coach and Professional Footballer, CEQUIN

Mala is a C licensed football coach and a Senior Women's professional football player based in Delhi. She has been a part of CEQUIN's Kickstart Equality football program , since 2011 leading the team as the Head coach and Project Officer for the last few years. She has also been the Assistant Coach for the U17 Delhi Girls State team, and currently serves as player in Sudeva FC. Having played at various state and national level tournaments, she's also closely associated with various clubs, academies and Sports Associations like AIFF and Delhi Soccer Association. She is passionate about creating the next generation of women footballers in India.

**‘ Bridging the #GenderGap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade - A Symposium ’
SPEAKER PROFILES**

**Panel 5 : Me to We - Stories of Grassroots Leadership from CEQUIN’s
Changemakers**



Moderator
Naseem Khan
Manager Programmes & Implementation, CEQUIN

She is very well known in Development Sector for last 25 years, having experience of working on Gender Based Violence via various National & International Project, Programs, Campaigns via networking & Alliance Building. She is always very instrumental for working for Social Change.



Shabnam
Member, Women’s Collective , Jamia Nagar

She is a changemaker, a role model for her family & community as well. She is associated with CEQUIN since its beginning, transformed her life from a home maker to a working woman. She is still very instrumental in a community-based support group called Mahila Panchayat to address the cases of Gender Based Violence. She is reaching out to thousands of families as Asha Worker.



Moin Khan
Agents of Change, Alwar, Rajasthan

In 2019, he became part of our Men Engage Program and is now an active member of the Leadership Club. Taking numerous initiatives for himself, his sisters, and his village, he played a pivotal role in encouraging CEQUIN to extend its presence and work within his community.



Antima
Seemapuri Coach

Hailing from Seemapuri, a football player has become a source of inspiration for many girls in her community. Recently, she represented CEQUIN in the Goals for Girls program and is actively contributing to the "We the Change" Project.

Concept Note

“ Bridging the Gender Gap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade “

5th February 2024, New Delhi, India International Centre

Greetings from Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) !

*The passing of the landmark judgment on the Women’s Reservation Bill 2023 in the Parliament, is both a cause for celebration and reflection. We need to ask ourselves - **Who have we left behind ? What will it take to make the women’s movement truly inclusive, as a platform to extend solidarity ? And how does women’s participation in leadership and the workforce contribute to India’s growth story ?***

*The history of the **Women’s Movement in India**, is replete with path breaking legislations like the PWDV¹ Act 2005, POSH Act 2013², and others. Despite countless examples in our country’s rich history, where women have claimed their space and led from the frontlines; today, 77 years after Independence - we are a far cry from the gender equitable country we had hoped to build .*

*As countries review their progress vis-a-vis the Sustainable Development Goals, according to Lancet³, despite efforts **India will not meet its target on SDG -5 Gender Equality by as late as 2090, and for nearly one-third districts in the country, this goal will never be met in the foreseeable future.** Standing at 127 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap⁴, India continues to be home to the largest number of child brides in the world - with almost 1.5 million girls⁵ under 18 years married annually. Despite an increase of 14.4% in the the female literacy rate from 2010 to 2021, 33% girls continue to drop out of school due to domestic work⁶. 29.3%⁷ of all women in the country have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. And 31.4 % of these crimes have been committed by their partners, husband’s or relatives themselves.⁸ Further, 72% of all women have experienced some form of economic abuse in their lifetime.⁹ While the Indian economy has grown more than 10 times since 1990, its female workforce participation fell from 30% to 19% in a span of 31 years, and rose again to 24% in 2022¹⁰. In the nation’s capital itself, while women’s literacy rate and education has improved, it has not translated into more women*

¹ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005

² The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

³ Lancet Regional Health - Southeast Asia, 2023

⁴ UNDP and Human Development Report, 2021- 22

⁵ UNICEF, 2022

⁶ UNDP and Human Development Report, 2021- 22

⁷ National Family Health Survey - 5

⁸ National Crimes Records Bureau, 2022

⁹ All-India Democratic Women’s Association Report, 2017

¹⁰ ‘Female Labour Force Participation rises to 24.%, The Economic Times, Nov 29, 2023

entering the workforce - where in 2022 alone only 9.4% of all women in Delhi were formally employed; severely below the national average.¹¹ **There is a direct correlation between rise in structural gender based violence and the decreasing rate of women's participation in the labour market** (especially true when we look at Delhi)¹². Last year, the UN declared that 'at the current rate of progress it will take another 286 years¹³ to remove discriminatory laws and close prevailing gaps in the legal protection of women and girls. Our country's growth story, when analyzed from a gender lens, is not too different from the global scenario.

Over the years innumerable collectives and organizations have built this movement of Gender Justice through sustained networks, collaborations and a system of care. What binds us together, is our collective vision and efforts towards a gender just and equal world, where the most vulnerable communities have a seat at the table, a voice. **We believe that equitable access and participation in decision making - from the home, to the streets, in the workplace, and in the parliament - हिस्सेदारी is the need of the hour ! None of us are equal till we are all equal! It is clearer than ever before, that a movement to advance gender justice, which truly galvanizes stakeholders from different sectors, and inspires equal ownership and accountability from all - necessitates co-creative action.**

Founded in 2009 by Sara Abdullah Pilot and Lora Krishnamurthi Prabhu, Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) works towards creating gender equitable communities, through a rights-based lens and 'Sports for Development' approach. Right from the start, CEQUIN has pioneered conversations around engendering public spaces, and amplified 'sports for development ' as a critical tool for girls to claim their public spaces. While seminal legislations like the PWDV Act 2005, highlighted the structural violence in the home and family - in 2005, there was no dialogue around the ['gendered nature of public spaces'](#) and the structural violence imbued in accessing the same. In 2009 -10 we presented our [findings](#) to the then Minister of Law and Justice, Government of India, National Commission for Women and UNDP. Over the years we have consistently engaged and collaborated with cross-sectoral stakeholders, partners and various central and state government representatives for transformative change. While many Sports for Development programs existed in 2010, none through a gendered lens. It was this deliberation to find an innovative design that led us to develop our model around football. Today over 2.3 lakh girls have been a part of 'Kickstart Equality' in Delhi, Haryana & Rajasthan, with over 50 alumni teaching as professional football coaches across the country. Advocating for a greater investment in women's football - in 2018, we convened the National Alliance for Women's Football in India (NAWF), a multi stakeholder coalition, which included members from All India Football Federation (AIFF), State Associations, clubs, academies, media, corporates, NGOs as well as professional footballers.

¹¹ 'Fewer Women in Delhi in Workforce...', The Indian Express, Dec 9 2023

¹² National Crimes Records Bureau, 2022 , Delhi has the 2nd highest number of 'violence against women' cases after Haryana

¹³ Gender Equality Across the SDGs, UN Report, 2022

For us, the dream of a gender equitable world has included men and boys, and our focus has been on building a new generation of feminist young men. Our campaign 'Make Delhi Safe' in 2012, with cricketer Virendar Sehwag, broke the mold of traditional gender programs, because it centralized the need for men to dialogue with other men about masculinity and behavioural change, becoming role models. We have come a long way since then, and today many organizations are engaging men to challenge discriminatory gender norms for themselves!

In our efforts for gender justice, we have advanced a lot as a sector, but have also regressed on certain aspects. During the PWDV Act, many coalitions were formed with grassroots collectives and organizations, with governments consciously investing resources and ensuring that budgets were set aside for gender programming. Despite these legislations and coalitions, today, rapes continue with impunity and violence against women and girls continues to increase. In 10 years, violence against women has increased by 87%¹⁴. With a changing world, we are now faced with newer forms of violence - like increasing Online Gender Based Violence across digital spaces. While girls are being retained in schools and drop outs have decreased, it is in no way leading them to dignified livelihoods. 'According to recent findings by the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) and the Human Development Index (HDI), the disparity in average income between women and men is more closely associated with prevailing gender norms than the differences in education levels. In countries where gender norms exhibit greater bias, women dedicate significantly more time, up to six times as much, to domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities compared to men.'¹⁵ ***Governments across the years have made proactive efforts to address these challenges*** by allocating budgets and enacting policies like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao', one-third reservations in the Panchayati Raj System and the 'Shakti Scheme'. ***Yet, there are still large gaps*** in skill building, presence of women in the labour market, political participation and their representation in the private sector.¹⁶

CEQUIN's model has evolved over the years, and it has been our learning that there is a need to move beyond simply 'addressing violence against women and girls', towards consciously strengthening systems, individuals and communities from a preventive lens. To galvanize transformational change, we must have a holistic approach that engages men, women, young people and critical stakeholders, making them equal partners in this journey.

As we reflect on the last 15 years of CEQUIN and as a run up to this year's International Women's Day, we are convening, " Bridging the Gender Gap : Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Decade ", a conference to deliberate on the critical strategies to address the Gender Gap through collaborations. Through the day, the

¹⁴ National Crimes Records Bureau, 2011 - 2021

¹⁵ 'Gender equality still a far cry', Forbes India, June 2023

¹⁶ 'India slotted low on... ', Times of India, June 2023

event will have multiple thought-provoking panels on Women's experiences and contribution in different spaces like Leadership, Economy, Media, Law & Policy, Sports, Entertainment and other sectors. Key stakeholders like government representatives, NGOs, journalists, lawyers, economists, researchers, think tanks, multilateral and bilateral agencies, athletes, writers, artists, civil society leaders and citizens, will weave dialogues around the collaborative strategies needed to ignite a movement for Gender Justice across the country. Our endeavor is to create a knowledge platform where different organizations and stakeholders can come together to learn from each other. And we would love to understand your learnings at an organizational and institutional level. **The event will be held in India International Centre, New Delhi on 5th February 2023, from 9:30 am to 5 pm.**

Join us to weave a common language for collaborative action, which moves hearts, heads and feet !

Details :

Date: 5th February 2024

Timing: 9:30 am to 5:00 pm

Venue: India International Centre, Multipurpose Hall, 40, Max Mueller Marg, Lodhi Gardens, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi, Delhi 110003

Google Location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/jkPBQPJbvwh2u4JV6>

For further information please contact nida.ansari@cequinindia.org | bency.issac.10@gmail.com

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#)

LIST OF OUT OF STATION PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Partner Dialogue Sunday, 4 February 2024

S.No	State	Organization	Name
1	Bihar	IZAD	Akhtari Begum
2	West Bengal	Swayam	Amrita Das Gupta
3	Jharkhand	Right to Kick	Anand Prasad Gope
4	Odisha	ActionAid Odisha	Ghasiram Panda
5	Jharkhand	Lok Jagriti Kendra	Imam Ansari
6	Rajasthan	Mahila Jan Adhikar	Indira Pancholi
7	Karnataka	Impact Dialogue Foundation	Pallabi Ghosh
8	Odisha	Aina Edu Society	Sneha Mishra
9	West Bengal	Madhabilata	Sourav Sikdar
10	Rajasthan	Manthan Kotri	Tejaram Mali
11	Uttar Pradesh	Milaan	Rati Mishra
12	Uttar Pradesh	Khel Project	Abhilasha Sachan
13	Madhya Pradesh	Synergy Sansthan	Ajay Pandit
14	Haryana	AMIED	Asha Rani Narang
15	Madhya Pradesh	Yuva Vikas Mandal	Ashfaque Ahmed
16	Uttar Pradesh	People's Awadh Forum	Gufran Siddique
17	Punjab	YFC Rurka Kalan FC	Jaspreet Kaur
18	Rajasthan	Jan Vikas Sanstha	Neeta Kumvat
19	Uttar Pradesh	Safe Society	Neha Mishra
20	Jharkhand	Social Development society (BSDS)	Sachi Kumari
21	Haryana	GWF Mewat	Sirajuddin Reyazi
22	Gujarat	Safar	Sophia Pathan
23	Rajasthan	Alakhpura FC	Suresh Kumar
24	Rajasthan	Vikalp	Usha Choudhary
25	Rajasthan	Vikalp	Yogesh Vaishnav

26	Haryana	SPECTRA	Ashish Taunk
27	PAN India	FXB Suraksha	Aslam Khan
28	Haryana	Alhasan Mewat	Hasan Mohd
29	Maharashtra	The Parcham Collective	Ishita Maria Godinho
30	Jammu & Kashmir	Jammu Kashmir Association of Social Workers	Khursheed Ahmed Farash
31	Maharashtra	The Gender Lab	Nisha Agarwal
32	Uttarakhand	Coaches Across Continents	Saraswati
33	Karnataka	The Pass Collective	Shaona Sen
34	PAN India	C3 India	Dr Anamika Priyadarshini
35	Maharashtra, PAN India	Indian Institute of Women's Studies	Dr Vibhuti Patel
36	Jharkhand	Yuwa India	Niharika Baxla
37	Karnataka	Political Shakti	Tara Krishnaswamy
38	Haryana	Rope Foundation	Meenu
39	Haryana	NPS Akera	Abbas Khan
40	Uttar Pradesh	Educate Girls	Shabnam Aziz