# SOUTH ASIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2022

## CONFERENCE OUTCOME REPORT

July 2022 | Bhubaneswar, Odisha




ORGANISERS




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"WOMEN ARE EPITOME OF KNOWLEDGE AND WE HAVE TO CONNECT TO THE GLOBE TO ASSERT THE POWER THAT WE POSSESS WITH HUMILITY."

**PROF. SASMITA SAMANTA**
*HON'BLE VICE CHANCELLOR, KIIT DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY*

# OVERVIEW & INTRODUCTION

The South Asia Women's Conference 2022, was jointly organised by the United States Consulate General, Hyderabad and the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS)

The conference created a collaborative platform for all the delegates to explore solutions for women and girls in South Asia by designing an institutional network for collaboration and women-led change, bringing together leading stakeholders from South Asia working on the broad rubric of gender equity and justice.

The theme of the conference was "**Towards an Equitable, Inclusive & Sustainable World**".



The two day conference was designed to include workshops, small group discussions, and breakout sessions, to encourage networking between alumni to develop innovative solutions to address key women's issues. The discussions explored topics like women's access to education, employable skills development, job opportunities, women-led entrepreneurship, advancing women's participation in democratic processes and politics, women's safety, and women in media.

*SOUTH ASIA ALUMNI WOMEN'S CONFERENCE*

# ATTENDEE DEMOGRAPHICS

The South Asia Women's Conference on 27 & 28th May, 2022 comprised select US Government exchange alumni working on gender equity related themes from Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India.

NEARLY 100 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

62 INDIAN PARTICIPANTS

12 ATTENDEES FROM 3 COUNTRIES SPANNING SOUTH ASIA

*This event attracted an incredible mix of participants from across a range of US Government exchange programmes, drawn in by the exciting prospect of strengthening the South-Asian network of women leaders:*

Alumni attendees came from a range of programmes including Texas Intensive English Program, English Program for Internationals, & Cultural Exchange Programmes. **Several attendees were alumni of IVLP programmes.**

**63.8%** attendees cited "**Networking**" as their **main motivation** for attending the conference.

Accordingly, **64%** cited networking as the **greatest highlight** of the conference.

Attendees hailed from various countries across South Asia:

- Nepal
- Bangladesh
- Sri Lanka
- India

# TESTIMONIALS

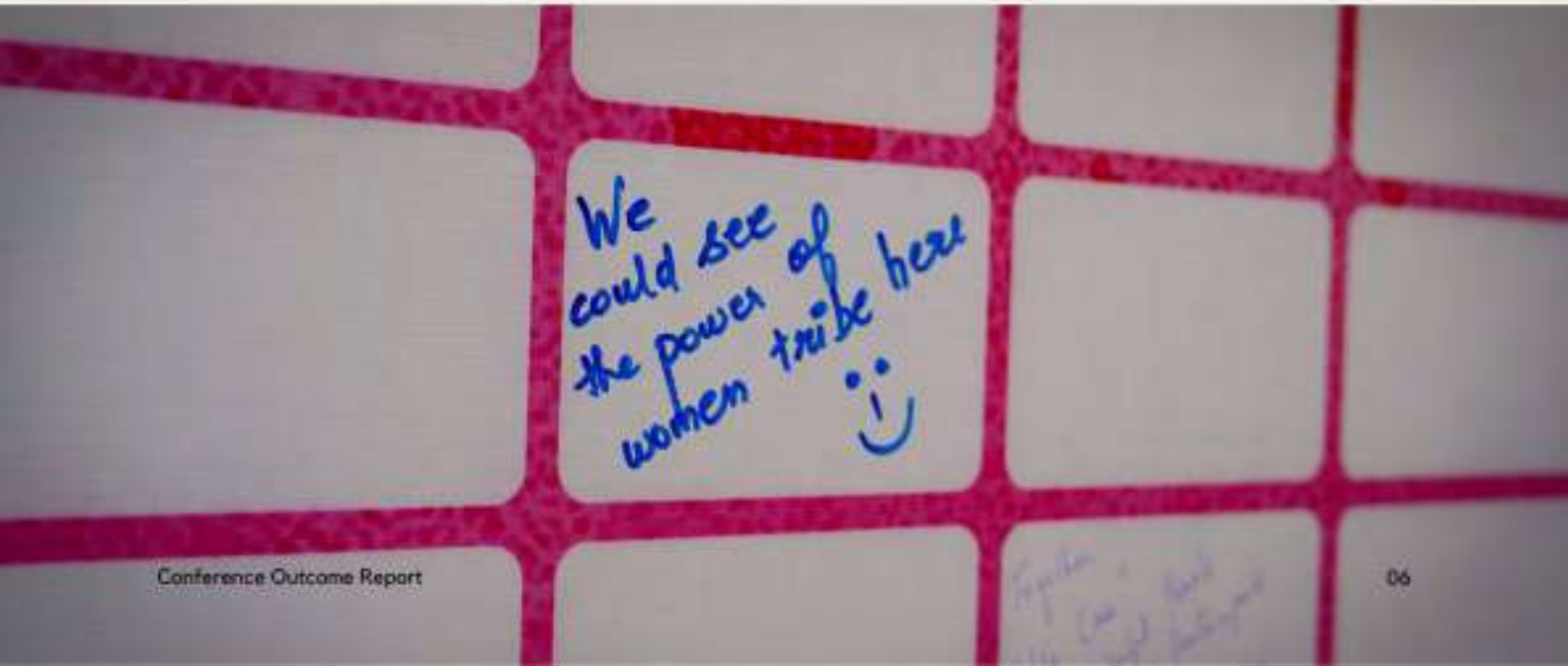
It's a great opportunity to meet and interact the persons who were came from various parts of the country and also neighbourhood countries too

It was a huge platform to create solidarity against violence against women. Spaces are great for learning and sharing.

It was good to meet many practitioners working in different aspects of women empowerment and gender studies

The networking opportunity and it helped break a bias as this is the first time I have interacted with a transgender person

We should absolutely continue doing this, if we all get this opportunity more often, I'm sure we will be able to change the world around us really soon. We all are a small droplet with an opportunity like this, I'm sure it's going to be a wave






> AS WOMEN, WE HAVE TO OPEN THE DOOR FOR YOUNG GIRLS AND THEY HAVE TO OPEN OUT FOR THE OTHERS. WE HAVE TO LEARN TO LEAN ON EACH OTHER. WOMEN DON'T JUST HAVE TO MARCH ON 8TH MARCH, EVERY ONE HAS TO MARCH TOGETHER TOWARDS EQUALITY

**NANDITA DAS**
*KEYNOTE SPEAKER*



# SESSION OVERVIEW

## Inaugural Session

**Keynote Address -**
Ms Nandita Das

01.

**Policy Making in South Asia through a Gendered Lens**

Integrating a gender perspective into all stage of designing and implementing policies and governance. Evaluating existing policies and advocating for gender responsive governance in South Asia.

02.

**Ending Gender Based Violence**

Exploring the importance of having an intersectional approach to Gender based Violence in South Asia

03.

**Women's Economic Empowerment: Opportunities & Challenges**

Building scalable & sustainable change in the field of women's economic empowerment to facilitate equality of opportunity, equal rights to economic resources & financial inclusion to advance their careers, financial livelihoods and wellbeing

# SESSION OVERVIEW



04.

**Volunteerism: Building a Gender Inclusive, Sustainable World**

Exploring the role of volunteerism and local level solutions towards building an equitable, inclusive & sustainable world.

05.

**Building Resilience in times of Calamity & Disaster - Gender Perspective**

To explore how issues of gender diversity of identities are connected to resilience and adaptation to man-made and natural disasters.

06.

**Driving the gender responsive implementation of Agenda 2030**

Systematically mainstreaming the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in all 3 dimensions of Agenda 2030 - economic, social and environmental

Valedictory Session




THE ABSENCE OF EQUALITY MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR COMMUNITIES TO RESOLVE CONFLICT, COMPLICATES EFFORTS TO BOOST ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND UNDERMINES COUNTRIES ABILITIES TO GROW THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF WOMEN IS A LOST OPPORTUNITY FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION. WE HAVE TO REGAIN THE OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVE GENDER EQUITY.

**FRANKIE STURM**

*ACTING PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER, U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL - HYDERABAD*



# INAUGURAL SESSION - SETTING THE CONTEXT

In the inaugural session, several distinguished participants and sponsors set forth their basic perspectives on the problem and stated their expectations from the deliberations which lay ahead.

**Prof. Sasmita Samanta, the Vice Chancellor of KIIT-DU**, situated the women of South Asia against their unique civilizational values. South Asia, she said, has always measured accomplishment in terms, not of possession of material wealth or professional success, but of inner spiritual realization. Women have played a formative role in shaping its core values, such as tolerance, patience, and peace. Women bear the responsibility to ensure the survival of the most definitive qualities of civilization in South Asia which they nurture and circulate while grooming their children or interacting with the family or society. Yet, if the labour and care of women make possible the success, stability, and prosperity of the family, society, or civilization in South Asia and of the world, women sometimes do not pay enough attention to themselves. She called for the distinguished participants to throw some light on this apparent conundrum. 'Time has now come that we women should now put ourselves, with great humility, in the judicious position that we deserve', she said. What is to be done, she asked, for women of South Asia to pay more attention to their well-being even as they care for the prosperity of the family and society in general?

**Frankie Strum, Acting Public Affairs Officer, US Consulate General, Hyderabad** presented the conference as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the US government and the alumni of various government exchange programs and to discuss women's

issues learn from the impressive achievements of the alumni. Speaking on the theme of the conference—the creation of an equitable, sustainable, and inclusive world for women—he noted that even though women make up 50 per cent of the world, their voices, accomplishments, and contributions are overlooked and undervalued. 'The untapped potential of women is a lost opportunity for economic growth, equitable development, and conflict resolution' he observed, mentioning in this context the commitment of the US government to regaining these lost opportunities, as underlined by its first-ever national strategy on gender equity and equality launched in 2021. 'This strategy underscores the US government's commitment to advancing the rights and opportunities of women, girls, LGBT persons, and other diversities' Straum said, looking forward to the conference to throw up insights on how similar strategies could be developed in South Asia through collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders.

**Ms Lakshmi Puri, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women** focused on the wide gender gap in South Asia as a major obstacle to development. 'On average one in three women in South Asia face violence at home and their representation in the parliament stood at less than twenty percent and the ratio of men and women in the highest decision-making forums stood at six to one', she said. Even though the UN system, civil society, academia, and the private sector have of late secured a veritable global gender equality compact around the agenda 2030 for sustainable development, to which the various national governments have committed at the highest levels, calling for an end to all forms of discrimination against them in law and practice', she believed that a set of fresh norms with an Indian perspective was required to implement the emerging consensus into practice. Presenting a set of nine normative principles-inspiration, implementation, institution, information, investment, innovation, integration, inclusion, and impact-or nine I's, as a guideline towards more effective implementation of the various emerging global compacts on gender equity and women's empowerment, Ms Puri called for SAWC to consider the ways in which the task of reducing gender disparity

in South Asia could be pushed through across all stakeholders on a mission mode.

The complex socio-economic structures of south Asian societies make the debate about women empowerment multidimensional, and rapid social and economic transformations have further heightened these debates, said Arun Sahoo, the High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago. Calling for initiatives for women empowerment to be sensitive to social, cultural, and historical context, he took up the issue of women's community development for special emphasis. As societies and economies bounce back to a high growth trajectory since the pandemic inflicted setbacks, he called for 'structural reforms to undertaken to empower women. 'I believe women's increasing engagement in modern and futuristic technologies will bring both opportunities and solutions, he said, calling for nations across the globe and South Asia to share resources and technology and hoping for the conference to work out creative ways to strengthen such institutional collaborations among peoples and nations.

Noted Indian actor, director, social activist, and sports administrator Rahul Bose in his brief video message wished the conference all success. Recalling his nonprofit organization The Foundation, which educates marginalized children and The Heal, which works to prevent child sexual exploitation, Bose said it was about time that we learned to see all developmental issues 'through a gendered lens', making the stakeholders aware of unconscious or subconscious biases, hoping that the seminar would evolve some 'workable, implementable and innovative ideas which the participants would later implement through their working practices.

Echoing that sentiment **Ms Acharapan Yavaprapas, Consul General of the Royal Thai Consulate General, Kolkata** said gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary ingredient for an equitable and sustainable world. 'Globally women have fewer opportunities for economic participation, less access to basic and higher education, greater health and safety risk, and less political representation than men' she observed, stressing that in Asia and South Asia in particular, patriarchal norms, compounded by

caste, religion, and ethnicity privilege men's access to opportunities and resources, rendering women more vulnerable to poverty, exploitation, and marginalization. 'What matters the most is to allow women to find their inner strength and to use their voices in driving change in society', she said. Sharing updates about the strategies that Thailand has followed to further women's development, such as ratification of various international conventions, a firm commitment to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, gender-responsive budgeting, measures to mitigate women's harassment in the workplace and facilitation of women's greater participation in business and political arena, hoping that Thailand's experience of success might inspire others to explore similar strategies.

Eminent Indian actor, writer, and director Ms. Nadita Das, who delivered the keynote address, stressed the need for allies. 'Somewhere along the movement, we have left out the men....we have to learn to seek help and to learn to lean on each other, to not hesitate to be vulnerable and also recognize that as our strength', she said.

Referring to intersectionalities, she said gender issues do not operate in isolation, and that even as women share common experiences, they nonetheless also come with individuated life trajectories mediated by privileges of class, caste, region, and access to English. These intersectionalities pose new challenges about how to create a sense of togetherness even as women of today carry along their differentiated individual experiences or 'a sense of sisterhood where we do not hesitate to seek each other's help'. Referring to the heightened burden on women during the recent pandemic, Das said it was not going to ease up unless men too learned to share the responsibility of running homes or caring for children, reiterating the need to 'educate' the men as good allies. 'This not a fight between men and women....we are all in it together...just as they are conditioned by patriarchy, so are we....', she said. Commending KIIT and KISS for the 'amazing work they are doing in the field of education', she encouraged the young audience, as potential agents of change in the future, to reach out to the battery of specialists attending the conference and be enriched by their vast knowledge and experience. 'Asking is

the first step towards finding solutions....it is possible to be humble, gentle, and nurturing and yet ask questions and say no when you mean no....it is our responsibility to support those around us, to give them the confidence to be themselves' she said. 'Each one of us has a different story, and a different journey...as women we must keep the conversation going', she said, describing the conference to be a baby step towards a long journey ahead towards building better allies.

**Mrs Tahila Rasamoelina, Charge d Affaires, the Embassy of Madagascar in India**, noted the irony that while in times of crises and uncertainty women's concerns are the first to be pushed aside, it is to the women that societies often make additional demands during such times. 'Through greater participation of women alone shall we find sustainable solutions to all the major global problems', she observed. 'I believe that the deliberations in this conference will lead to tangible steps towards an inclusive equitable and sustainable South Asia', she concluded.

'Who had priority access to a mobile phone during the pandemic in cases where only one phone was available to the family?' asked Ms. Abha Mishra, UNDP, State Head, Odisha, referring to the ways in which disasters and policy measures alike differentially impact its various targets. 'The Covid pandemic has shown how the community members are differentially impacted', she said, underlining such differentiated choices made within families even in normal times with regard to access to education, food, or employment, and calling for the conference to deliberate upon the dynamics of such differentiated gender mediated access to resources and opportunities. Commending KISS and the US Consulate General Hyderabad for organizing the conference, she hoped it would generate useful policy-level solutions. 'UNDP has always believed that gender equity and justice needs a multistakeholder engagement and collaboration' Mishra said, reflecting with approval on the diverse character of the audience, hoping for greater capacity building among them and enhanced use of digital technology-driven solutions to synergize local and global level strategizing and practice.

**Mr Himanshu Bal, the State Head of the World Food Programme, in Odisha**, connected the question of women's empowerment with the question of how to remove hunger. 'We have to empower men and women at the same time....if we can empower the household as a unit, it eventually leads to the empowerment of the community and the world at large', he said. He called for more practical solutions, such as the Mission Shakti project by the government of Odisha, which mobilized millions of women through the formation of self-help groups, and gives them access to empowerment and equality through income-generating work and reciprocal solidarity networks.

The inaugural session presented a set of clear and cogent objectives, beginning with a range of definitions of women's empowerment and grounding the challenges facing women in south Asia on wider global concerns, and highlighting a set of focus areas, such as education, employment, domestic violence, calling for greater representation of women in positions of decisive authority economic and political domains, in order to influence proactive and effective policy-making towards a gender just and sustainable world in the foreseeable future. The speakers generally called for the delegates to deliberate upon these concerns and work out practicable and user-friendly policy solutions.






EMPOWERMENT IS BOTH AN AGENT AND A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL CHANGE. IT IS ABOUT CHOICE AND ABILITY TO INFLUENCE ONES DESIRED ACTION AND BE PART OF DECISION MAKING PROCESS.

**MR ARUN SAHU**

*IFS HIGH COMMISSIONER OF INDIA TO TRINIDAD & TOBAGO*
















# GALLERY




SOUTH ASIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2022
Mr. Rahul Bose








SOUTH ASIA
WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE
2022


2022

# GALLERY

# Session 1 - Guide

## Policy Making in South Asia through a Gendered Lens

**Date**: 27 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 11:45 am - 12:45 pm

### DESCRIPTION:

The South Asian region is plagued with inequalities arising from severe gender-based discrimination that holds back progress and development.

It is crucial that we integrate gender as a conceptual lens in all the stages of designing, evaluating, and implementing policies for effective governance. Women have very low representation in policy-making roles across South Asia - as political figures in ministerial positions, as bureaucrats, and in judicial systems. It suggests a dire need for increasing representation to inculcate gender-equitable perspectives in the formulation and implementation of progressive and equitable policies.

Thus, in this session, we hope to explore the integration of a gender perspective into all stages of designing and implementing policies and governance, whilst evaluating existing policies and advocating for gender-responsive governance in South Asia.

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

**Alumni Speaker 1:**
**Prof. Sasmita Samanta**
KIIT University, India

**Alumni Speaker 2:**
**Dr. Netajee Abhinandan**
Ravenshaw University, India

**Guest Speaker 1:**
**Ms. Rawnak Jahan**
CARE, Bangladesh

**Guest Speaker 2:**
**Ms. Neetisha Besra**
John Hopkins India Foundation, India

**Moderator:**
**Dr. Hem Borker**
Jamia Millia Islamia University, India

**Video Message:**
**Ms. Sheila Jagannathan**
World Bank, Washington DC, USA

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches
[5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A
[facilitated by moderator]



# SESSION 1 OVERVIEW

The session was connected with the objective of integrating a gender perspective into all stages of designing and implementing policies and governance, evaluating existing policies, and advocating for gender-responsive governance in South Asia.

**Sheila Jagannathan, Lead Learning Specialist and Programme Manager at the World Bank's Open Learning Campus**, noted the sharp dip in the participation of women in the labour force in South Asia since the pandemic, at 24 percent, within domestic chores and child care eating into their time. *'Nearly 46 million girls in South Asia of primary and secondary school going age are out of school'* she said, noting that the pandemic has *'undone decades of gains in the domains of economic empowerment women's education, poise, and agency '*. Yet, thanks to the stellar work of organizations such as KISS, *'we do have an opportunity for a more inclusive recovery'* she said, which requires *'doubling down efforts on women's empowerment, girls' education and better access to digital services'*. *'It is no longer a question of whether to use technology for women's empowerment but of how quickly we can get started'* she said. Digital technology can immediately facilitate women's access to better financial services; Globally, 9 percent more men have access to Bank accounts. Digital technology has the potential to immediately reduce that gap.

**Prof. Sasmita Samanta, the Vice Chancellor of KIIT and an accomplished academician and academic administrator** with over twenty fives years of experience, reflected on the peculiar nature of women's engagement with society and the community. She observed

that the *'connectedness of a woman with the community and society is mediated through what she does for the family and the children'*; a woman receives an honorable place in society only when her family or children do well. While noting that the language of policies at various levels is increasingly getting more gender-sensitive, she called for making systems at the workplace more gender-sensitive, partcularly with regard to institutional ethos. *'Are the institutional ethos sensitive to women or are they followed because they had been around since generations?'*, she asked. Reflecting on age-old social cultures which valorize *'graceful sacrifice by women as a desirable virtue'*, she said women themselves must now learn to combine making claims for their due rights with grace. *'The real challenge is to incorporate a gender-sensitive ethos in unstructured systems, such as in our default presumptions about the world and people*, she said, suggesting that greater use of technology-enabled solutions with a human perspective could go some distance toward that objective. *'To come out of the bureaucracies of technology, which limit diversity in the workplace, education, or our daily life, the need of the hour is to bring a humanocratic system to technology design and usage and if we are conscious ourselves, we can certainly usher in some revolutionary changes'*, she observed in conclusion.

**Dr. Netajee Abhinandan, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, who specializes in International Relations and is the Founder Director of Kalinga Institute of Indo Pacific Studies (KIIPS),** a Bhubaneswar-based policy thinktank, spoke on gender perspective in governance. *'The process of governance has to have people at the center* as 'decision-makers, agenda setters, and executors of various policies and programs, and *'women invariably form half of the people'* he said. *'Institutions of democracy remain partial and flawed if they do not include women, youth, people with disabilities, and minorities as both agents and beneficiaries'* he said. Most south Asian countries operate as *'procedural democracies'* which rarely carry out substantive deliberations, accommodate dissenting voices, or make people real stakeholders in the process of governance. *'Democracy, even in India, has been reduced to the electoral process without any*

*mechanism to make elected representatives accountable to their constituents*' Abhinandan said. In that context, inclusivity, defined as continuous participation of the governed in the process of governance, emerges as a fundamental challenge to governance. '*According to the voice and governance Index of the Worldwide Governance Indicator, only Indian among the south Asian countries score above zero*', Abhinandan said. South Asian countries are so engrossed in playing identity politics-religion, caste, ethnicity, language-that they hardly make room for disparate voices from marginalized groups to be heard. Informal institutions such as family and personal connection bar women's access to power, with informal power brokerage and patronage governing political participation, through which men rule by proxy even if women occupy formal positions of authority. The dynamics of real power in South Asia still remain intricately linked to family and personal connections. The symbolic presence of a handful of women in positions of political authority cannot mask the essentially patriarchal nature of society in South Asia.

The exercise of real power in South Asia is typically divorced from accountability and responsibility since they are divorced from formal domains and operate through informal and unaccountable networks. Against this pervasive structural limitation, the state must make enabling legislation and policies to ensure that women are made part of the legislature, law, and governance at all levels, if necessary through judicial reforms, Abhiandan concluded.

**Ms. Rawnak Jahan, who holds a law degree and works with CARE, Bangladesh as Acting Director, Women and Girls Empowerment Programme**, offered an overview of the challenges facing women empowerment in Bangladesh. The major problem is that women's choices or voices are almost wholly absent from decisions about their well-being. '*It is very normal in Bangladesh for elders to make decisions for girls and women*', she said. Glaring loopholes often defeat the purpose of progressive legislation even where it exists. For example, the progressive thrust of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017, which fixed 18 and 21 as the minimum ages for boys and girls, was

overshadowed by a rider (Section 19) that sanctioned underage marriage under special circumstances 'when it is in the best interest of the child. '*That exemption clause is misused and treated as a license for underage marriage*', Jahan observed. It is a serious concern where the majority of the people do not disapprove of child marriages and where the governance structures are weak. The journey from the enactment to the useful implementation of an enabling law in Bangladesh is very time-consuming. '*It takes an inordinately long time to persuade the policymakers about the purpose of an enabling law or policy and implementation is harder still since the budgetary allocation is inadequate and the mindset of those charged with implementation is often discouraging*' she noted. The voices of women and girls in Bangladesh are largely missing from the process of defining the best interests of women and girls, she concluded.

**Ms. Neetisha Besra, the Programme Lead at the Johns Hopkins India Foundation and an alumnus of IIT, Kanpur, TISS, and Harvard Kennedy School**, said policy making is an essential instrument toward closing the gender gap. Citing the example of Iceland which has been making gender-sensitive policies since 1974 and currently tops the ranking among countries in reducing the gender gap, she noted that it is mandated in the current Icelandic education curriculum to include gender equality as a formal subject to be taught right from preschool to college. One of these policies provides for 40% reservation for the Executive Board Members in private corporations while another encourages men to participate in caregiving activities. Similar policies were seen to work even in much poorer countries such as Rwanda, which ranks 7 in the gender equality report, where women make up sixty percent of members in the parliament, and where eighty percent of women participate in the workforce following deliberate policy making since the 1990s. India is ranked 140 in that report since the political and economic participation of women is extremely low. The position of other South Asian countries is not much different. 'India ranks in the bottom five countries where health and survival of women are concerned, Besra said, attributing low participation of women in positions of authority in political, economic, and governance structures to '*regressive social norms.*'

Reflecting on the stages of policy-making process-evidence, policy design, policy adoption, and monitoring implementation-she showed that the absence of women in every one of these stages hampered prospects of gender sensitive policy-making. If there is political commitment, irrespective of gender, we will be able to push forth with the policy agenda. Finally, she called for gender disparity to be integrated into the curriculum. 'If we are not taught, we won't be able to see it and the lack of sensitivity towards the widening gender gap will persist, she said. Finally, 'if we don't have enough women in public spaces we will not be able to integrate the gender lens into policy-making' she concluded.

**Jamia Milia Islamia Professor Dr. Hem Borkar, who researches the dynamics of education among young Muslim women and published her Oxford University D.Phil as Madrasas and the making of Islamic Womanhood**, was chairing the session. Summing up the proceeding, she said the onus is on women to become an effective political constituency. Even as conferences like SAWC help to break the silence on the gender gap, for these deliberations to become truly transformative, there is a need to act on these deliberations.

Participants in the session identified structural factors which inhibit the adoption of a gender lens on policy-making, referring, for instance, to regressive social norms (Jahan, Besra), restrictive dynamics of political authority (Abhinandan), and lack of education and advocacy (Besra). However, they agreed that much more needs to be done in terms of putting in place enabling laws and policies as a precondition for gender unjust social norms to change, calling for immediate adoption of gender-sensitive policies and seeking out allies in the form of incentivizing men to be a part of a common objective toward reconceptualizing women empowerment as a means to universal empowerment.
















# GALLERY

# Session 2 - Guide

## Ending Gender-Based Violence

**Date**: 27 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 12:45 pm - 01:40 pm

### DESCRIPTION:

Gender-based violence against women and girls is multi-dimensional and deeply rooted in inequitable societal norms.

At least one-third of women in the world have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. In South Asia, these figures are higher than in most countries, and this has unfortunately escalated during the Covid-19 pandemic, revealing the need for new, ambitious solutions for preventing gender-based violence in society, including highlighting the significant role of education in informing gender sensitivity and norms among the young generation and families, engaging men and boys, and highlighting the need for stronger partnership between public and private sectors.

The session aims to explore through dialogues and discussions the importance of having an intersectional approach to Gender-Based Violence in South Asia.

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

Alumni Speaker 1:
**Ms. Anindita Majumdar,**
Equidiversity Foundation, India

Alumni Speaker 2:
**Ms Swetha Shankar**
International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim care (PCVC), India

Guest Speaker 1:
**Ms. Mamta Borgoyary**
FXB India Suraksha, India

Virtual Speaker:
**Ms. Gwendolyn S Myers,**
Messengers of Peace, Liberia

Moderator:
**Mr. Shashikumar Velath**
BRIDGE Institute, India

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches
[5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A
[facilitated by moderator]



# SESSION 2 OVERVIEW

**Ms Anindita Majumdar Managing Trustee, Equidiversity Foundation, India,** shared her field-level experience of working with women's leadership in rural governance through the Panchayati Raj system since 2016. She spoke about three strategies to deal with gender-based violence. Women were not a homogenous group. They were not merely women, daughters, or wives but their identities were mediated also by factors like caste religion or geographical particularities. Her team had to reckon with these multiple realities while designing a mentoring programme. These women were also facing a good deal of control, violence, and oppression within their homes and community and lacked spaces to talk about it. The challenge was how to get these underequipped women representatives to engage with women voters and come up with a woman's agenda. 'We realized that our approach has to be community driven and community-led, that we needed to work with children and the youth and, look into larger questions of gender equality, masculinity, diversity, and constitutional values' she said. Gradually, strategies such as holding open public meetings and involving the youth and children began to throw up concrete local issues such as questions of women's safety, such as lighting or creche or the need for fencing around the ponds, issues that local women themselves began to suggest. The provision of funding with the Panchayat proved to be an incentive since it would lapse if plans to use it were not made on time. Women also gradually gathered the courage to speak up against violence against them. It was indeed possible to develop a degree of genuine empowerment of women around the local self-government institutions. Yet, there remains the longer-term

challenge with women's capacity building on a sustainable basis. Often enough the elected representatives are forced to return to their homes after their term gets over, which effectively wastes the capacity that they had built during their term. such as how to continue to work with elected women representatives once their term gets over and new women candidates are chosen. Finally, they began to engage boys and men as active stakeholders in women's empowerment. 'Unless and until gender roles and power dynamics shift, nothing positive is going to happen, she concluded.

**Ms Mamata Borgoyary, CEO of FXB India Suraksha**, an NGO which works with women and children in 14 Indian states, too referred to the need to reckon with 'multiple oppressions' while looking at the various layers which amplify gender-based violence. Policymakers and practitioners on the ground need to 'keep this lens of intersectionality in our minds ...it is about how different layers of challenges and obstacles amplify gender-based violence', she said. She shared two best practices her organization successfully worked out, one at the systemic level and one at the community level. 'There are two important gaps which increase women's vulnerability to violence: one is weak response systems and the other was stigma and discrimination', she said. Referring to a study her organization carried out in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Police, they found that 'perception biases' based on patriarchal norms often came in the way of an effective response to gender-based violence. For instance, they did not report human trafficking in the Banchhada community since they believed that trading in women was a normal activity for them. Likewise, cases of missing girl children were often dismissed as deliberate elopement. These negative mindsets need to be knocked upon, again and again, she said. She also pointed out the need for greater practical training in law for those tasked with responding to cases of gender-based violence. 'We have therefore carried out several training sessions with the police, the judicial system and with journalists on how to design and implement hands-on response to gender-based violence', she said. Finally, she mentioned three projects involving some community-level interventions, during which they found overwhelming ignorance and apathy about human trafficking.

That is when they started the first responder movement', a popular sensitizing programmes involving engagement with students, and law enforcement agencies who work with the community to raise awareness about the perils of child marriage and with children and men looking to break gender stereotypes.

**Shweta Shankar, who heads the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care**, spoke from the perspective of a ground-level service provider to survivors of gender-based violence. Observing that the most common approach to service provision to gender violence survivors-such as counselling, government intervention or other support structures-revolves around reconciliation or to 'somehow prevent the breakdown of the family as a unit, often neglecting the question of the agency or choice of the survivors themselves.' Instead, she said a survivor-centric or trauma-informed perspective should guide our approach. Touching upon the institutional challenges before reporting gender-based violence is often a complex challenge even in normal circumstances, she emphasized the need for designing survivor-friendly institutions and systems which make them feel comfortable to report instances of violence. Calling it a major challenge before the implementation of gender-sensitive policies, even if they were made, she too pointed toward the questionable mindsets and attitudes of those in charge of implementation. Besides 'responses against gender-based violence are often reactive...one the one hand survivors find it hard to report and on the other society often celebrates extra-judicial murders as sufficient justice for such crimes. 'Our understanding of justice is so skewed that everyday access to justice is denied to a large number of people', she said, calling for institutional reforms, especially in the police and the justice delivery mechanisms 'to the extent that services to victims of gender-based violence are delivered.' 'There is no sense in creating more services in silos and essentially hold up the patriarchal agenda', she said, echoing Mamata Borgoyary. While it is fair to invest more time and effort in the prevention of gender-based violence, it is as necessary to look upon effective service provision to survivors, which enables them to break out of cycles of violence, as a mode of prevention.

Every participant in the session focused on the issue of patriarchal norms and perception bias as a major factor behind the rise in gender-based violence or the insufficient response mechanism against it. They singled out the absence of women in effective positions of authority as the single most important disincentive against women's empowerment. Every one of them also underscored the need to adopt a larger approach to devise better response mechanisms against gender-based violence. Some called for engaging the wider community including children and men, and others called for institutional reforms and multi-stakeholder participation, and an intersectional approach to the problem. In terms of solutions, each of them presented a best practice or two which in turn were based on the application of these insights.


















# GALLERY

# Session 3 - Guide

## Women's Economic Empowerment: Opportunities & Challenges

**Date**: 27 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 3:00 pm - 04:00 pm

### DESCRIPTION:

The economic participation of women is not only important for the advancement of women's rights to promote gender equality but also for the economic well-being of families, communities, sectors, and nations.

Women have faced substantial gaps in terms of lack of opportunities for career development, equal rights to economic resources, access to capital, financial inclusion, digital inclusion, sustainable livelihoods and greater well-being, with the pandemic exacerbating all the factors. So, there is a new urgency to build scalable, inclusive and sustainable solutions, keeping in mind the care economy as a valued component, leading to women's economic empowerment and well-being.

Thus, in this session we hope to explore the building of scalable & sustainable change in the field of women's economic empowerment, to facilitate equality of opportunity, equal rights to economic resources and financial inclusion, to advance their careers, financial livelihood and wellbeing.

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

Alumni Speaker 1:
**Ms. Suruchi Singh,**
Charismatic Crayonz Private Limited, India

Alumni Speaker 2:
**Ms Vrundan Bawankar,**
De'haat Foundation, India

Guest Speaker 1:
**Dr. Monica Setia,**
Ahmedabad University, India

Guest Speaker 2:
**Ms. Tanaya Patnaik,**
Eastern Media Ltd, India

Moderator:
**Ms. Surekha Routray,**
KIIT Technology Business Incubator, India

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches [5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A [facilitated by moderator]



# SESSION 3 OVERVIEW

Almost every participant in the three earlier sessions had touched upon the question of women's economic empowerment. They variously referred to the lack of women's economic empowerment as a major obstacle to sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development in South Asia. However, the third session of the first day was dedicated exclusively to exploring solutions for effecting scalable and sustainable change in the domain of women's economic empowerment. It focused on how to facilitate equality of opportunity, equal rights to financial resources, and financial inclusion for women, with a view to improving their career and financial well-being in general.

**Surekha Routray, head of Social Incubation and CSR at KIIT TBI**, who moderated the session was clear that 'economic empowerment plays a greater role in facilitating other kinds of empowerment, such as emotional, social or political empowerment.

**Ms. Suruchi Singh, who runs a social enterprise called Crayonzs and handicrafts Haat,** an NGO which connects Indian handicraft professionals directly to their customers. When she herself found it hard to return to the job market, which was not ready to hire a new mother, she set up a small outfit, buying up directly from artisans and selling at various urban fairs. Eventually, it grew big and today one of the artisans her company supports employs as many as 57 workers. Their approach to handholding artisans is holistic. Apart from skilling, it also involves making sure the entire family is taken care of. 'We see to it that the children go to school, the women have bank accounts and manage to secure loans' she said.

These innovations were made over time, in response to specific cases. Currently, they have launched the concept of the smart village; they adopt a whole village and train artisans or other homepreneurs (including those who make pickles, or papad, for instance) in the basics of marketing and entrepreneurship, to make the whole village self-sufficient. Women's economic empowerment means 'her right to their body, their livelihood, and their economic status... she has a right to education, she has a right to financial literacy, and a right to skilling and upskilling' she said. Empowerment for her meant making provisions for these resources for women to face the fast-changing world today. 'It is very important to have a holistic knowledge pack', she said, 'when you train someone, the approach has to be holistic, right from making sure they are educated at the basic level right up to the level where they learn how to manage their finances, including training leaders in villages who must know how to run the system on their own once the external support is no longer available.'

**Vrundan Bawankar, who founded De'haat Foundation, India,** which too trains women artisans and entrepreneurs in rural India initially began by running a school for children. Her objective was to ensure that children in rural India must receive good quality education near their homes. Rising dropout rates eventually forced her to focus on allied issues. 'We were so busy at the school that we did not pay attention to what was happening elsewhere' she said, 'but then we realized that when the breadwinner of the family (usually the father) is no more, the mother tended to take the children out of school.' Only if the mother had a source of steady income, she would have the confidence to send her children to school again. 'We initially tried to find her some job in the village, but such jobs were simply not rewarding enough. For instance, a woman in a Maharastra village in 2018 needed at least 5000 rupees to survive but she received only 1800 rupees a month working at a village grocery store. Incidentally, the daily wage act at the time pegged the minimum monthly wage at around 6500. It was then that she decided to ask the women to make paper pens, which she managed to sell at a good price in the market. 'I was going for IVLP and I sold those pens for a dollar each and on one day we got five lakh thirty-two thousand rupees' she said, thanking the IVLP

programme for directly helping the women of her village to turn a new leaf. 'We now priced it 10 rupees and started selling in our vicinity... gradually word got around that the school gives work to women in distress and more women started approaching them. She recalled the case of a woman with a history of domestic violence inflicted by a drunk and indigent husband. 'Within six months, we had seventy women working with us full time, making newspaper pens' she reported. 'I realized that even a fairly modest monthly income of six or seven thousand rupees had dramatically improved the quality of their lives' Bawanakar said, with a smile. It boosted their confidence so much that later when during the lockdown the foundation was distributing relief and rations, and the village women 'demanded work more than relief. That's when she came up with the idea of making masks. 'From mid April 2020 to October 2020, we made eight lakh masks, and more than a hundred women got an opportunity to work and earn...that was our biggest achievement', she said, her face glowing with satisfaction. Later they diversified into making hand-woven fabrics and currently have more than three hundred women from Maharastra and West Bengal working with the foundation.

Responding to Bawankar's intervention, moderator Surekha Rautray observed that women are resilient and independent by nature, and more than the piecemeal relief, they need the capacity to earn a living, for which education, especially secondary and higher education is an essential requirement.

**Dr. Monika Setia who heads the Office of International Affairs at Ahmedabad University**, speaking on the theme of higher education for women as an aid to economic empowerment, stressed the vital need for a creative synthesis between the work of activists at the ground level with academics and researchers on the issue of women's empowerment. Defining economic empowerment as 'women being able to take the economic decisions within the household, having access to income and financial assets including access to employment and participation in the local community making some economic decisions', she connected the issue of economic empowerment with the larger process of individual development or the 'fuller expression of the self' to which several delegates during the

inaugural session alluded. 'You will agree with me that a major positive transformation happened to your life when more of you were given an opportunity to express yourselves, through your work or when you speak about what you think should be done in your respective domains or work or study', she said. Education has a major role to play in that process of development of the self. Education-'not merely the formal degrees, but skill building and professional development training, such as the US government exchange programme'-- facilitates the emergence of that distinct individual self in all of us, to understand 'what is the right choice for me, and when you are ready to take control of your life', Setia concluded. With particular reference to economic empowerment, education comes into the picture in multiple forms, such as professional training leading to a rise in income or position and the support such rise provides to the quality of life in the household. Then there are indirect effects such as greater control over the health or hygiene decisions in the family and greater contribution to the larger national economy, and through participation in the social and economic life of the larger community. 'There is convinci research' she said, 'that if a part of your population is excluded from the national economy, then it is going to negatively impact the GDP of the country.' Speaking on enabling policies at Ahmedabad University, she referred to the diversity of the staff and the multidisciplinary education it deliberately promotes. 'Around 30 to 40 percent of teaching and administrative staff hired are women...among the students, about sixty percent are women....theren there is the incubation centre which promotes entrepreneurship not only among students but also to outsiders who seek help', she said. She concluded with memories of her early years in a modest refugee colony in Haridwar, where often a veterinary doctor treated humans, attributing her subsequent higher education in the US and all later accomplishments to the high-quality of education that she received, profusely thanking the US government exchange programme. These programmes make a huge difference to the ways women begin to think about leadership and their social and cultural lives' she said. Setia too, like others before her, clearly gestured to the intersectionalities and the need for holistic approaches to deal with the challenges and work out practicable

solutions for women's economic empowerment. Setia's intervention also showed that cross-cultural learnings make women a more dynamic individuals and when those learnings are integrated within personal and familial values, the society emerges richer and more accommodating.

Cross-cultural learning certainly helps when it comes to women working in the media, which is easily one of the hardest sectors with a pronounced gender bias, not the least because it involves odd hours and relentless travels. Speaking next on women's economic empowerment with regard to media, was **Ms Tanaya Patnaik, Executive Director - Eastern Media Ltd.**, the largest media house in Odisha. The company operates across several media formats, including a vernacular daily, radio channel, a TV channel and strong digital footprint alongside allied concerns. While the entry was relatively easy for her, because her father founded the organization. 'It is useful for us to understand our privileges', she said, 'and use it to drive change'. 'There is an underrepresentation of women not only in the workforce but also in the way women are portrayed in the media' she said. One of the needling problems she faced was related to retention.The distinctiveness of her presentation lay in identifying the ways organization empathy complements systemic and processual changes, especially in the domain of implementation. She noted that a respectable enough number of women joined at the entry level but few appeared to last, maternity and childcare responsibilities often coming in the way. She, therefore, called for safer transport facilities and more affordable childcare facilities as a possible solution to address these challenges. 'The employer too has to create a gender sensitive workspace and work culture, along with the family and the spouses supporting young working mothers are a major requirement', she observed. Speaking about enabling steps taken by her own organization, she said that 'we try to be more sensitive...when a woman goes on a maternity break...we talk to the men and help them become more sensitive...a new mother does not have to spend her time worrying whether she would lose her job' she said. 'It is not always about systems or policies...once we granted a two months extension to a colleague on maternity leave....these little gestures go a long way in

strengthening women's economic empowerment', she concluded.

Responding to whether career break is essentially an urban phenomenon or affects women in rural areas, the panel members agreed that rural women in these instances probably receive a greater degree of community support from women themselves. On the whole, the solution that appeared to come forth most prominently from this panel was the need for cooperation and empathy among those in the vicinity of working women, with regard to displaying greater sensitivity and sharing the burden of care work in particular. The panellists agreed that it was not always about larger policy changes or systems corrections, but individuals and communities working together with the working women who can bring positive transformations by making relatively small adjustments to their outlook and approach to the question of women rising up to take charge of her economic decisions. But most importantly, women-centric organizations succeed not only because they make or sell excellent products, but because they work with the drive that they have to provide jobs to women. This additional charge, or the desire to stretch one step further for a socially compelling vocation, must inform all organizations employing women, agreed all the panelists.











# GALLERY

# Session 4 - Guide

## Volunteerism: Building a Gender Inclusive, Sustainable World

**Date**: 28 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 09:30 am - 10:30 am

### DESCRIPTION:

In this session we seek to explore the role of volunteerism and grass-root level solutions in paving the path to a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable society.

In doing so, we hope to explore two main areas: looking at how gender roles affect people's participation in volunteering and examining the critical role that volunteers play in promoting gender equality through their activities.

Participation in voluntary action can facilitate women's empowerment by enabling them to develop their capacities, obtain new skills and increase their chances of social participation when they may not be allowed in other spheres of work or family.

Similarly, volunteering activities and grassroots initiatives play a vital role in contributing to gender equality by spreading awareness and generating local level change.

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

Alumni Speaker 1:
**Ms. Aneesa Firthous,**
Islamic Women's Association for Research and Empowerment (IWARE), Srilanka

Alumni Speaker 2:
**Ms Sujata Mohapatra,**
Sadhana Foundation, India

Guest Speaker 1:
**Mr. Swaraj Kumar Banerjee,**
T'Classic Pvt Ltd, India

Guest Speaker 2:
**Mr. Yasar Ahmad,**
UN Volunteers, India

Moderator:
**Ms. Taruni Kumar,**
Change.org Foundation, India

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches
[5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A
[facilitated by moderator]



# SESSION 4 OVERVIEW

The next session was dedicated to the ways in which the practice of volunteerism offers solutions toward building a gender-sensitive, equitable and sustainable world. Taruni Kumar, Regional Training Manager, Asia, for Change.org, an organization which specializes in online petitioning, said the community they made relies on the lived experience of women. Lived experience, she said, 'allows them to mobilize more effectively, and share their experiences with the community which creates a greater desire to support one another'. 'What has been effective for us is not telling them what to do, but how to do it', she observed. Sharing her experience, she recalled a case in which a petition by a single mother in 2016 made the External Affairs Ministry of India finally remove the compulsory requirement of the father's name in a passport application. That change has since trickled down to education certificates, caste certificates and PAN cards, where it is no longer compulsory to mention the father's name. Second, they work with no sense of hierarchy and maximum decentralization, which makes for greater equitability. It offers a template of what the rest of the world should be, she said. They stress particularly on building allyship. There is no restriction on entry, except the minimum age of eighteen and a basic command of the English language, making for wide ranging and regular interaction with women from multiple cultural or identify backgrounds. This has taken some responsibility of creating change off the women from marginalized communities, she said. It makes it possible for individuals with some privilege to lead campaigns with inputs from those the campaign directly affects. She recalled in this connection a successful campaign for the transgender community by a

non-transgender individual. The campaign in 2019 forced several political parties to mention their position on the question of transgender rights visible in their election manifestoes. Likewise, a woman journalist succesfully led a campiagn toward the building of a road in a remorse tribal pocket of Odisha, where the people earlier had to make a nearly 10 mile journey top acess education or markets. Her privilege, or access to the District Magistrate in this instance, was here leveraged to make a positive change in the lives of the marginalized tribals. The effects of voluntary work towards women's empowerment are visible in various ways. Successful alumni often turn into active trainers and encourage others to participate. They often begin to wok in smaller communities based on particular themes, issue or regions. These petitions, as successful precedents, also inspire similar campiagns elsewhere, meaning petitions coveruing the same issue in a different geographical areas. Those who sign the petitions often form their own communities working on similar issues, Taruni said, referring as example to a growing community against Female Genital Mutilation. Sometimes, participation in online petitioning serves as an apprenticeship, promoting individuals towards activism and advocay in other domains or thorugh other media. Kumar reffered in this context to the work of a school teacher in Chandigarh who now runs podcast on menstrual hygiene.

Kumar underlined three clear practices. First, online petitioning successfully moblizes women, and even builds a bridge between the relatively privileged and the margunalized women, provided it is carried out in a decentralized and non hierarchical manner. Second, she showed that online petitioning offers a particularly usefulo tool to scale up a campaign, by vastly expanding its reach. Three, it successfully builds a sense of allyship and community to between the beneficiary and their well wishers.

**Aneesa, Firthous, President of the Islamic Women's Association for Research and Empowerment (IWARE)**, spoke about the making of their organzation around the struggle for the rights of separated Muslim women in Sri Lanka. A school teacher by profession, Firthous first came to know them in 1997 when she discovered that their children, or her students, had been performing poorly in the class. She gradually

approached these these margianlized women and found that their plight was due largely to the patriarchal character of the Qazi courts or family courts.

'We understaood that there were many discriminatory provisions in the institution of Qazi courts', she said. These were an exclusively male institution. Women were not allowed to be judges, jurors, or even a marriage registrar, according to the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act in Sri Lanka.

Since lawyers are not allowed to enter the Qazi courts in Sri Lanka, women volunteers went with the aggrieved to the Qazi courts, understanding its functions and later training and advising the survivors, including lessons on how to write afidavits or file cases. However, they uderstood by 2004 that that these piecemeal support was not going to be enough, unless the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act itself was not amended. The 1951 act had never been amended until then. It contained horribly discriminatory provisions including one which allowed marriage of girls well below the lagal age, provided the Qazi sanctioned it. The girl's consent is not is a requirement so long as the father signs off the papers. The provision appeared to resonate within comarable customs in Bangladesh, to which Ms. Rawnak Jahan had earlier alluded.

They began to lobby for a reform of the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, coordinating with several organizations in Colombo and seeking reforms at the cabinet level. Conservative Islamic scholars did not want to touch it, claiming it would be unIslamic. Finally, in 2018 a committee was formed to recommend to the government ( Saleem Marsoof Committee), which submitted a 323 page report to the Justice Minister at the time, who was a Muslim himself. In this context, she bemoaned the absence of women in positions of decisive political authority. A bill was eventually drafted but the current political crisis in Sri Lanka erupted before it could be taken up for debate. Firthous's exprience showed that women at the grrassroots level could mount a campaign to initiate amendments in Muslim personal law by means of forging solidarity networks amomg marginalized women themselves, even where external help or training was not available.

**Sujata Mohapatra, the Secretary**

**of the Sadhana Foundation** which works on mainstreaming anti gender violence campiagns and women's education, sais she started volunteering since her school days. She joined Institute of Youth and Disaster Preparedness, Junior Red Cross, and National Service Schemes (NSS) picking up useful experience working with professional social workers. Later she began working with Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) projects focusing on persons with disability and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) as a national service volunteer. She had a long stint with RTI campaigns, later setting up Sadhana Foundation with a bunch of vomuteers, working on youth leadership and adolescent education. 'For us adolescent life skills education is a major means to fight against gender based violence', she said. Recalling her work in 2016 among nearly 5000 individuals in the slum areas at Bhubaneswar in association with Mission Shakti Programme through which the Odisha government had formed 7 lakhs self help groups (SHG), working in income generation, capacity building and financial inclusion, Mahapatra said initially the women found it hard to speak up. "It took a long time, nearly five years, but during the pandemic I suddenly found one of them speaking fluently to a journalist, attributing her eloquence to the training we gave them", she said, beaming. It was a classic case of the volunteer movement giving voice to formerly voiceless women. She also referred to her work with the US Consulate General, Hyderabad, during a capacity building programme against gender based violence in fifteen colleges, she said that volunteerism trains students how to organize prgrammes within modest budgests, bringin in professional development, social skills, access to training and participation in decision making process. Finally, volunteerism provides handholding support to women with acces to power and resources.

**Swaraj Kumar (Rajah) Banerjee, a tea planter from Darjeeling, who had carried out significant empowerment among the women workers in his estate at Makaibari**, said empowering rural women can fulfil the agenda 2030 well before schedule. His initial passion with planting trees later evolved into a five point agenda for sustainable development. Recalling his experience of empowering marginalized women in remote hill villages, he said 'unless and until

women are empowered, no community can march ahead'. He spoke about a five point formula that worked for them-making the soil healthy by permaculture mulch, extensive use of cow dung as manure, empowering women through bio gas plants and income generation, digital hubs-and created a dynamic society. 'It leads to a complete green circular economy, designed and worked exclusively by empowered women', he observed. 'Sustainable development is all about using the resources in your hand dynamically', he concluded.

**Yasar Ahmad, who is a Management Associate for UN Volunteers, India** echoed similar sentiments. Speaking on his experience of streghtenening volunteering infrastructure in India, where the UN volunteers works in 58 districts in partnership within the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of the government of India, he said that the primary task consisted in setting up Youth Clubs by men and women between the ages 15 to 29 and making sure that the members have full authority to run those clubs. Referring to a successful intervention from Malda in West Bengal, where many young girls dropped out of school soon after puberty, Ahmad said within six months the Youth Club volunteers had reached out to women in 1.5 lakh households, talking about safe menstrusaion and selling affordable sanitary pads, including 10000 of them in a school, creating institutional access for mesntrutaing girls to menstrual hygiene. 'Whenever we design volunteerism based solutions at the local level, we rely on three pillars or three Cs' he said. The first is contextualization, meaning solutions are offered based on local needs, resonating with the point earlier made by Taruni Kumar. If they helped with mounting a campaign against unhygienic menstrual practices in Malda, in Haryana they supported a mobolization against the practice of female foeticide, and in Varanasi they helped women with digital literacy and finacial literacy while in Bihar they supported a women's hockey team which went on to excel at the state level. Collaboration was the second successful principle Ahmad mentioned, reaching oit to every stakeholders at the community level, such as parents, religious leaders, community leaders or school pricipals, and building allyship along the way. Such collaborations make it easy to talk about sensitive issues and sustain the initiatives over a long time. Communication forms a third

critical strategy, documenting the challenges and the learnings. Volunteer work in every one of the districts offers unique challenges and solutions and a systematic compilation of the learnigs allows others elsewhere facing similar challenges a body of knowledge and solutions to guide their interventions. Moreover, sharing information about successful interventions often encourage neighbouring communities to break similar barriers. For example, stories about the successful women's hockey team in Bihar inspired women in neighbouring villages to take to playing sports as a means to a greater life and freedom. 'These three Cs helped us create unique solutions, weather from the gender lens or with regard to involving men or women in volunteering at the rural level', he concluded.

**Gwendolyn S Myers, Founder and Executive Director of Messengers of Peace (MOP)-Liberia Inc**, a non-for-profit, youth led organization, which mobilizes young volunteers through peace clubs in schools and vulnerable communities in Liberia. 'There is no heart stronger than the heart of a volunteer', she said. 'Even if you get paid to do a job, you can refuse to do it but the heart of a volunteers go beyond compensation to begin with', which makes volunteerism a particularly exalted form of service, she explained. Her organization works with over 1500 young volunteers associated with Peace Clubs and advicacy of gender based violence. Referring to the earlier presentation by Sujata Mahapatra, Myers said 'volunteers help open the eyes and ears of the people, getting them to speak up'. She attributed the recent decision by the President of Liberia to treat rape as a national emergency to the student volunteers who went down to the street and refused to move. Given the magnitude of the work they do, Myers called for the society at large to more visibly recognize and encourage the work of volunteers.

Four points came out quite strongly across all the five presentations. First, volunteerism must spring from a felt need at the local level, and solutions from above must never be enforced. The success or sustainability of volunteerism relies largely on its local roots for nourishment. Second, the decscive agency and energy must come once again from the local level volunteers. More resourceful external agencies often provide resources or training in

capacity building. However, the real drive or vitality of any successful voluntary movement must arise from the agency of its local members and their planning and leadership. Third, women often perform several deceive tasks with greater solidarity among men, though it is often crucial to forming enduring alliances with men and all stakeholders at the local level, for successful alliance-building alone ensures long-term sustainability and intersectoral support and participation. Finally, volunteerism makes for a great education and apprenticeship. Even if volunteerism does not deliver immediate success, it often prepares the ground for more sustainable leadership or empowerment models.

















# GALLERY

# Session 5 - Guide

## Building Resilience in times of Calamity & Disaster: Gender Perspective

**Date**: 28 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 10:45 am - 11:45 am

### DESCRIPTION:

Natural hazards don't discriminate between genders, but their impacts do.

The better we understand what drives the differentiated outcomes of disaster impacts for different populations, the better policies and interventions can be tailored to strengthen resilience for all.

Women play an active role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

Acknowledging and formalising their participation can have positive effects on results.

The session aims to explore how issues of gender diversity of identities are connected to resilience and adaptation to man-made & natural disasters.

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

Alumni Speaker 1:
**Ms. Trupti Jain**
Naireeta Services, India

Alumni Speaker 2:
**Ms. Pujafula Pattanayak**
Health and Family Welfare, Odisha, India

Guest Speaker :
**Ms. Sunita Reddy**
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Moderator:
**Ms. Abha Mishra**
UNDP, Odisha, India

Video Message 1:
**Ms. Agnes Cserhati**
AC Power Coaching, Germany

Video Message 2:
**Mr. Satya S. Tripathi**
KISS Deemed University, India

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches
[5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A
[facilitated by moderator]



# SESSION 5 OVERVIEW

The session was focused on looking at the question of building resilience in times of disaster through the lens of gender. The moderator of the session Abha Mishra, who heads the Odisha wing of the United Nations Development Programme and moderated the session, began with recalling an observation by Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. Wahlstrom said that 'disaster risk reduction that delivers gender equity is cost effective win win situation for reducing vulnerabilities and sustaining the livelihoods of the whole communities.' Men and women feel the impact of disasters differentially, Mishra observed. Even though a disaster such an earthquake or a virus does not recognize gender of its victims, its impact is always mediated through gender differentials. The objective was to mainstream the understanding of this differentiated impact so that it is reduced over time. She referred also to an expansive definition of the gender perspective, including differently abled individuals and transgender communities, which she requested the panellists and the audience to keep in mind. She requested the panellists also to talk about how technology may be an aid to bringing greater gender parity or equity.

Trupti Jain, who is a director of Naireeta Services Private Limited, an Ahmedabad-based NGO which works on gender-centric climate change mitigation processes for urban and rural poor women through an innovative irrigation technology, began by observing that the impact of disasters on women is usually greater. 'We follow the Gandhian principle of 'Antyodaya', reaching to the poorest women first so that we can develop the society

as a whole', she said, reflecting on their core philosophy. Referring to the story of a woman farmer called Sankobehn whose family has a smallholding of 2 to 3 acres of heavily salinated land which get waterlogged during Monsoon, and remains uncultivable in other seasons for lack of access to borewell irrigation. These constraints forced her to migrate to urban areas as construction labour, hampering, in addition, the health and education prospects of their children who accompany the mothers to their worksites. Against this context, Jain's NGO developed a technology-based solution over 6 to 8 years with the help of local women. It involves installing a world bank sponsored proprietary rainwater harvesting system called Bhungroo. It is a cylindrical pipe which clears out water during Monsoon and in lean periods it ensures adequate irrigation. In monsoon, it injects filtered stormwater water in unsaturated subsoil strata and in lean periods it withdraws water by use of low hp moveable pumping systems. 'From no crops, they now grow at least two crops in a year, Jain said. Now the likes of Sanknehn are tripling their income. Within three to four years, they have built pacca housing and are fully out of debt. '

This is the impact of technology on thousands of women farmers like Sankobehn', Jain observed. The gender perspective in the solution in noticeable in the way women share its benefits. Since one unit of stored water can irrigate 7 to 8 acres of land and the storage facilities provide for four hundred thousand to forty millions litres of water to be stored, the system delivers maximum benefits only if it caters to a large community. To make it cost-effective, seven or eight farmers must work together as a team. 'It is a combined community activity, involving sharing of labour and resources and women work more harmoniously as a team' Jain observed. Their earlier experience of working in self-help groups helped in bonding as a team. So, Bhungroo rights are awarded to groups of women. 'When women have water rights, they have a substantial say in economic decisions at the household level', Jain observed. Given that it is very hard for women to have land rights since it confers a status that men do not wish to lose, Bhungroo rights or water rights empower women by compensating for their lack of land rights. In addition, Jain's organization build capacity for women by training them application of the Bhungroo technology. Since the women were

involved in the project from the beginning, they no longer have to depend on men for technology management or maintenance. The Bhungroo technology not only increased their income but also brought them a life of dignity, Jain said, adding that 'it breaks the myth that gender and technology solutions do not get along'. Technology has brought a distinct rise in their quality of life and standing in society. Earlier they were labourers and now they have graduated to becoming self-employed farmers. The women are now called climate leaders, since the programme helps them beat the challenges of extreme climate, in addition to doubling their income, creating rural employment and staging an agricultural revolution through climate resilient technology worked through gender inclusive growth. The project is now implemented in 12 states in India and three other countries in Asia and Africa (Bangladesh, Vietnam and Ghana), benefitting more than one lakhs of women farmers. She concluded by outlining some other areas where the technology can deliver positive outcomes through rainwater harvesting and conversation. 'If you give women the opportunity to manage technologies, they can work wonders, by bringing not just more income but dignity' Jain said, calling for greater adoption of such projects all over the world. Jain's presentation showed how it is possible to mitigate some of the impacts of extreme climates and even generate employment and greater political and economic agency through empowering women to manage innovative technological solutions. It also showed that nutrition, food security and livelihood concerns can be productively resolved with cost-effective technology-based interventions.

**Ms Pujafula Pattanayak, Project Manager at the Centre for Advocacy and Research and State IEC Consultant, to the Health and Family Welfare department of the government of Odisha**, shared some of these sentiments in her presentation on the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on women. Speaking on the role of women in mitigating the impact, and the takeaways from that experience towards making women better equipped to face such disasters in future through capacity building, she said 'women were the worst sufferers during the pandemic, particularly in the domain of reproductive and menstrual health.

Even though men had greater mortality rates, the socio-economic and psychological impact on women was much higher, Pattanayak observed. 'More women lost jobs on account of greater dependence on public transport and for having to shoulder greater childcare responsibilities. Moreover, women-headed households suffered more because the limited state-sponsored welfare measures (such as Antyodaya yojana or Madhubabu Pension Yojana) could not compensate for the massive income loss. She called for greater budgetary allocation in gender-responsive social welfare policies such as health insurance, paid sick leave and maternity leave in both formal and informal sectors against this background. 'We cannot even measure the additional burden of unpaid care work that fell on women and adolescent girls during the pandemic', Pattanayak said, adding that they had to take care of the elderly who had been infected despite the isolation rules, causing far greater mental and physical stress on women. The girls often had to drop out when the schools introduced online teaching since families with a single mobile phone usually gave it to the male children. Girls were also victims of early marriage, trafficking and several other discriminations at home. 'Studies said domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence drastically increased because men were at home and they took out their frustration on women and children as if it was their birthright, she observed, sarcastically. Various reproductive services such as maternal health, family planning, institutional delivery or pregnancy termination services were adversely affected. 'I often received calls that ambulances were not available or no one picking the phone from centres of institutional delivery and so on', she said. Maternal and child mortality rates suddenly shot up. Moreover, since a majority of health workers in India are women-such as nurses, ASHA or Anganwadi workers-they were often infected on account of having to work ceaselessly, and their mental health often suffered. Even as they were working round the clock for the community, sometimes their own families did not allow them to return home for fear of contracting the infection. 'You can imagine their mental condition when they were facing dead bodies at work every day and at the same time their own families treated them as a source of infection and refused to let them

return home' Pattanayak said. Pattanayak called for gender sensitivity in policy to address domains such as the design of uniforms and vaccine distribution, calling for greater budget allocation in particular. The design of standard PPE suits was made with men in mind, they were often too large for women frontline workers. Likewise, when the vaccines were to be paid for, low-income families often privileged their men at the expense of women, especially those below 60 years of age. Pattanayak concluded with a reference to the frontline role women in Odisha played during the pandemic. 70 Lakh women under mission Shakti, along with ASHA and Anganwadi workers, were at the forefront of the relief work, generating awareness and providing cooked food to various institutions. Then many Gram Panchayat heads suddenly gained authority, when a unique policy decision by the government in April 2020 provisionally gave them the authority of a District Magistrate under section 51 of the Disaster Management Act of 2005. They now had the authority to provide rations, inclusion in various government schemes, implement special measures for returning migrant workers or manage temporary medical centres. 'When the state chooses the women to serve the society from the front in times of disasters and crises such as during the Pandemic, it must also begin to make policies to allocate larger budgets toward their mental and physical well-being', she concluded.

Building on that spirit, **Dr Sunita Reddy, an Associate Professor at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi,** spoke about the ways governance structures facilitate or restrict mainstreaming of gender issues in disaster relief and on the role of academic institutions in influencing the policy space. Offering examples of the convergence of concerns around gender and disaster, she recalled a case in which after the 2004 Tsunami a girl refused to return to the shore and preferred to die because she had no clothes on and there were too many prying eyes at the shore. 'It may be a mere story to you, but it reflects a great deal on the question of women's dignity and dominant social values', she said. In another instance, she recalled that relief items were sent back because sanitary pads were packed in the same bags, referring once again to the limits of popular belief systems.

Finally, she referred to the additional pressure on poor women to find more jobs during the recent pandemic especially when their husbands lost theirs. When disaster hits, she said, women take more burden and are ready to work even during the little time they otherwise get for rest. 'Post Tsunami, land rights were given to men and when boats were given women did not know how to use them, since they were not used to operating them' she said. Over time, relief distribution has become more gender neutral and also caters to the needs of men and women separately. Sharing an image of an Auxiliary Nurse from Jharkhand who went to work with her baby strapped onto her shoulder during a flood wading through waist-deep waters to deliver vaccines to covid patients, she observed that even though women are often described as vulnerable, notice should be taken also of instances of such determination and resilience among women. 'We should have more research and literature on this capacity of women to cope up and build resilience to take care of the whole family' she concluded.

**Agnes Cserhati, the CEO of AC Power Coaching**, a niche leadership coaching institute in Germany, too spoke at length on resilience, describing mental resilience as a powerful source of competitive advantage. Resilience, she said 'was not about being tough or emotionless but about turning things around and recovering fast from difficulties, focusing on what you can control and influence and relentlessly seeking an opportunity in the middle of a crisis'. Resilience always lives beyond the comfort zone, and the concept of resilience is a positive asset in the context of disaster, as it is bolstered by positive virtues such as resistance, flexibility and creativity. 'A crucial part of resilience is to be able to restore worldly functions as quickly as possible during times of disaster', she said. The greater the capacity of a society to strike back after a disaster, the more quickly it recovers and requires the least quantity of external aid. She emphasized the need for gender-sensitive policy in disaster management, especially since care responsibilities play a major role in disaster mitigation and relief management. 'Empowerment of women is the key to strengthen community resilience against disaster ', Cserhati concluded.

**Satya Sundar Tripathy, the Secretary General of Global**

Alliance for a Sustainable Planet and the Chancellor of KISS-DU recalled his experience of coordinating Tsunami on behalf of the United Nations in Indonesia. Referring to the idea of man-made disasters, Tripathy said the term is especially accurate since men often have the decisive say in development decisions which usually lead to disasters. On the other hand, 'women bring to this conversation a nuance, and a certain level of understanding of nurture or how to conserve nature, he said. Gender plays a significant role in dealing with natural disasters, he emphasised, adding that 'the sooner we wake up to the gendered reality that resiliencies greatly depend on gender diversity and respect for all genders, the easier it will be to deal with the catastrophic climate challenges that lie ahead.















# GALLERY

# Session 6 - Guide

## Driving the gender-responsive implementation of Agenda 2030

**Date**: 28 May 2022
**Venue**: Conference Hall 4, Convention Centre, KIIT
**Time**: 11:45 am - 12:45 pm

### DESCRIPTION:

Women's equality & empowerment are one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and are integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. Gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres. The session explores various aspects to systematically mainstream the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in all 3 dimensions of Agenda 2030 - Economic, social & environmental. Concisely, we can say that this agenda is cumulative of all the agendas we have discussed earlier, and it is important to provide a larger picture to ensure gender equality by 2030.

### PANEL STRUCTURE:

30 minutes for individual speeches [5-7 minutes each]

30 minutes for group discussion & Q&A [facilitated by moderator]

### SPEAKER OVERVIEW:

Alumni Speaker 1:
**Ms. Manjula Dharmalingam,**
Her Second Innings, India

Alumni Speaker 2:
**Ms. Medha Kohli,**
Girl Effect, India

Alumni Speaker 3:
**Ms Elizabeth Abba,**
XIM University Bhubaneswar, India

Guest Speaker 1:
**Ms. Seema Tiwari,**
UN Women, India

Guest Speaker 2:
**Ms. Aiswarya Sehgal,**
UNESCO, India

Virtual Speaker:
**Ms. Simona Costanzo Sow,**
UNSSC, Germany

Moderator:
**Mr. Suraj Kumar,**
KISS, India

Video Message:
**Ms. Nishtha Satyam,**
UN Women, Timor Leste




# SESSION 6 OVERVIEW

The sixth and final session deliberated on driving a gender-responsive implementation of Agenda 2030, especially on how to mainstream the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in all three dimensions-economic, social and environmental-of Agenda 2030.

**Dr Suraj Kumar, a veteran of the UN system for over two decades, and a pioneer in linking the SDGs with ICT development and Senior Advisor to KISS** moderated the session. Recalling Jawaharlal Nehru, whose death anniversary fell on May 27, Kumar referred to his extensive contribution to gender justice and sustainability. He would regularly write to Chief Ministers reminding them of the need to have more women legislators.

'The one sure shot way to empower humanity is to empower women and

SDG 5 is a prerequisite to achieving all the other 16 goals', said **Nishtha Satyam, the Mission Head of UN Women at East Timor** in her brief online address, congratulating the organizers and promising to work closely with the recommendations from the conference.

Manjula Dharmalingam, the efounder of her Seconds Innings, a skilling platform which enables women to resume work and career after a sabbatical, began with the spirit of what she called 'we have power and we are power'. She recalled her own story of quitting a rewarding career in the IT sector back in 2007 in search of greater professional fulfilment. A chance visit to Mumbai, where she met a few senior women professionals struggling to return to work after a sabbatical, meanwhile inspired her to start an offline version of hersecondinnigs but it was a bitter failure. Most companies rejected the

candidates outrightly and those that agreed to hire them offered pitifully low remuneration. Instead of shutting the concern down, Dharmalingam decided to return to her hometown Bangalore and give it another shot. 'This time, I did not get the blunt rejections as I did it Mumbai' she said. While people generally offered encouragement, 'it took me one and a half years to crack a business deal', Dharmalingam said. It made her realize that 'empathy or encouragement does not by themselves translate into business'. 'The businesses said we can't talk to you unless you match their skill sets with our needs' Dharmalingam recalled, describing how they were forced to expand the scope of their operations. Today nearly thirty thousand women, sitting at home and looking to return to work, access the platform, 'get reskilled or connect with potential employers. They have also tied up with several IT companies including most of the fortune 500 companies.

Ms Medha Kohli Production Specialist, Girl Effect, India, celebrated the theme of the role and importance of technology in the media 'in creating a more inclusive, more forward-looking and more represenatitive'. 'Technology and social media can be such powerful tools for the self-actualization of women and girls, and their aspirations, needs and dreams', she said. Awareness of mobile phone-based internet has grown much more among women, and the gender gap there has narrowed. 'In India, women's awareness of mobile internet has increased from 19 to 50 per cent between 2017 to 2019 while in Bangladesh the disparity among men and women on mobile internet has almost disappeared she observed. In India, the proportion of women mobile phone users who watch videos at least once a month has increased from 42 per cent in 2017 to 74 per cent in 2019. One of the handful of positive takeaways from the terrible pandemic days was the increase in the use of mobile phones among women. 'Girls are more likely to move to the digital space to look for answers to questions that they cannot ask their family or society, such as questions about pregnancy or reproductive health', Kohli said. One major takeaway from this conference, she said, was 'to reflect on goal 17 of SDG, which is a partnership and one of the ways to achieve it is to look towards digital interventions'. Kohli emphasized the need for greater synergy between on ground and

digital interventions. For example, she spoke about their Chha Jaa campaign, a digitally focused social purpose initiative leading to tangible behaviour change while winning the love and trust of millions of adolescent girls. 'Girls are moving much more to online sources which enable access to information which help them make choices about their own body, health, dreams, aspirations and careers', she noted, calling for more enabling campaigns to have a strong online presence.

**Dr Elizabeth Abba Associate Professor, School of Sustainability and Dean of International Relations, at Xavier's University Bhubaneswar,** who spoke next, began by commending Bangladesh and Afganisthan on the good progress they made towards fulfilling the SDGs. While the participation of women in the labour force is impressive in Bangladesh and Nepal, it is increasing only moderately, she observed. Looking at the SDG scores, she said that SDG 2,5, 9 and 10 scores in South Asia are fairly low. She too echoed Medha Kohli and several previous speakers that digital technology interventions have the potential to improve gender equality. Recalling Ms Lakshmi Puri's reference to the 9 I's in the inaugural session, Abba spoke about her personal experience of working with three of them- investment, innovation and inclusion. 'The CSR funds going towards SDG 5 is lower than allocations towards other goals', she observed. She reflected also on her personal experience of training women on social entrepreneurship and developing content for greater awareness of environmental concerns.

Recalling her move to Odisha four years ago, Seema Tiwari, Strategic Engagement Consultant for UN Women, Odisha, spoke of Odisha as a land of opportunities, commending the government for its openness to collaborations. Referring to the practical challenges of social entrepreneurship for women, especially in the digital domain, she lamented that the phones given to women are more often used by their children. 'So, in addition to training women, we have to find a way to train the young boys and girls, she observed. Calling for more attention to 'what is happening on the ground', she observed that 'change in scale can take place only through more institutional partnerships. Reflecting on the partnership of UN Women with Odisha Skill Development Authority in the skilling sector since July 2020,

she reiterated the need to train more women in social entrepreneurship in particular districts such as Sambalpur, Dhenkanal, Mayurbhanj, Bargarh and Rayagada. 'It is going to take time but we must continue to work together to support the girls and women out there, not only in the domain of skilling but also in the education sector' Tiwari said, stressing partnership as the mantra to sustainable interventions.

Recalling her background as a competitive swimmer, **Ms Aishwarya Sehgal, a Programme Associate with UNESCO**, began with her first-hand experience of how women sometimes managed to overcome challenges through participation in sports. She referred to three main domains of working with men and boys as potential allies to combat gender inequality: advocacy, research and capacity building. In the domain of research, they have collaborations with International Centre for Research on Women, and regarding capacity building, she spoke about UNESCO programmes such as Transforming MEN-Talities and Action for Equality. The latter involves a gender transformative curriculum for master trainers who teach school students. 'Classrooms offer a useful place to have challenging conversations on gender-based violence', she said. UNESCO works with various advocacy organizations to build networks and alliances. 'We must all join forces to make our voices and movements stronger since this is the decade of actions for the agenda 2030' she said in conclusion.

**Ms Simona Costanzo Sow, Learning Portfolio Manager, Policy Coherence at the UN System Staff College (UNSSC), Germany**, explored some of how the core notions of the 2030 agenda relate to gender mainstreaming. SDG 5 can not be achieved in isolation, and it requires progress across all goal areas. 'One of the strengths of agenda 2030 lies precisely in these linkages between the various goals' she said, echoing Nistha Satyam earlier. 'The agenda is not merely a technical agenda but a political one', in that 'it defines a societal vision which cannot be achieved through technical approaches alone but requires a recognition of the interests and influences of various societal actors.' Addressing these influences means unpacking the black box of power structures Sow said the key will be an enabling environment that goes beyond the. opportunities to learn and work, but

'secure livelihood, ability to enjoy their human rights, reduction in unpaid work which hinders the enjoyment of those rights and meaningful participation as actors and leaders in their communities. It calls for a better understanding of power structures-visible and invisible, hidden or institutionalized. Her presentation offered three key messages, that there must be effective linkages and synergies between the goals, that to advance transformation we must address the power dimension of the agenda by looking at concrete interests and influence and that gender equality and women's empowerment needs the effort of the society as a whole, whether it is the government, civil society, the academia or the private sector.

Moderator Dr Kumar concluded the session with a quotation from Margaret Atwood; If not now, then when? If not you then who? 'it is not only about the supply side, or how we can provide more access to resources but also about structures, institutions and wider eco systems'.















# GALLERY



# VALEDICTORY SESSION

The vibrant and extensive exchange of ideas and opinions over the two days culminated in an elegant valedictory session. As one of the speakers in the session observed, even as the contributions came to an end, reflections and insights will continue to resonate and inspire, along with the connections built over the conference. Formally thanking the guests, delegates, and other participants, along with the organizing team, Prof. Achyuta Samanta, the distinguished educationist, philanthropist, social worker, and a member of the Lok Sabha who founded KIIT and KISS thirty years ago, noted with pleasure the wide coverage of the event in the media and shared his experience of the institutional priority to women empowerment at the two universities. He described respect and empowerment of women as one of the main secrets of the growth of KISS and KIIT, noting with a smile that women occupy a majority of leadership positions at KIIT and KISS. The two universities have put in place an organizational culture in which men and women, across the entire gender spectrum, enjoy an equal pedestal in regard to accessibility, decision making, and co-creation of a safe environment for the staff and students, ensuring zero tolerance for gender-based violence and support to survivors of such violence, concluding with several such examples from among the students of KISS.

Echoing similar sentiments, Sunitha Krishnan, Chief Functionary and General Secretary of Prajwala Foundation, which works against child trafficking for sexual exploitation, reflected on the uneven provision of empowering resources unfairly favouring a handful of wealthy and privileged individuals, and effectively discriminating

against a large majority. The task of imagining sustainable development solutions is faced with such mighty challenges of structural inequality. Until and unless this basic inequality in access to resources is reduced, the SDG goals will remain hard to achieve. NGOs such as KISS or Prajwala may have delivered some excellent solutions toward a sustainable world, but such examples must now be scaled up, to bring about larger structural changes in society. Reddy called for greater synergy among all stakeholders to ensure that the last person within the community has access to the necessary resources for empowerment.

**Simona Constanza Sow, Learning Policy Manager at the United Nations Systems Staff College at Bonn**, too emphasized synergy. SDG 5 (gender) cannot be achieved in isolation, but in coordination with progress on a number of other SDG goals, such as reducing poverty and inequality or providing access to affordable education, education, and justice (SDG 1, 2, 3,4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16), as both a prerequisite and an outcome. Recalling the SDG document, she emphasized the need for transforming the world in its title, meaning a deliberate departure from business as usual, seeking synergies and questioning traditional strategies of development, and approaching the document, not as a technical but as a political agenda. Noting that a majority of participants in the conference attributed the main challenges to gender concerns emerging from deeply rooted values, attitudes and mindsets, or the 'hidden part of the iceberg, she called for greater attention to the dimension of power, interests, and influences as envisaged in the 2030 agenda. The conference has clearly shown the need for the topic of gender equality to be kept high on the political agenda, she concluded, urging the delegates to work out at least one concrete intervention and one future collaboration with an agency among those present at the conference, in the immediate future to improve the quality of life for girls and women.

**Bhaskar Jyoti Sharma, Secretary to the Women and Child department of the Government of Odisha,** regretted the trend in society which still tends to gloss over gender violence and undermines gender equality, recalling a case in which he had stood firm in punishing an offending government servant for

molestation, braving resistance of the colleagues of the punished individual. Even as the government tries to nudge society toward gender neutrality, enacting laws or launching schemes, Sharma regretted that the official processes of investigation and conviction for crimes against gender still took an inordinately long time.

**Strategic Public Engagement Adviser of the US Consulate General at Hyderbad Salil Kader** in his closing remarks generously commended the organizers on the successful conclusion of the conference, further consolidating the decade-old partnership of KIIT and KISS with the Consulate, starting with the English Access Scholarship Programme. Kader urged the US exchange programme alumni, who formed the majority of delegates, to continue to get and stay in touch and generate new ideas for various US consulates in India to support, calling it a logical outcome of the conference.

Prof. Deepak Kumar Behera, Vice Chancellor of KISS-DU, in his vote of thanks, commended all stakeholders, emphasizing the need for greater coordination, networking and synergies. Speaking from his professional perspective as a cultural anthropologist, Prof. Behera observed that patriarchal norms are more powerful in South Asian society, where customs and traditions shape the lives of women more effectively than law, urging the delegates to address that fundamental aspect in their work.

The takeaways from the valedictory session may be summarized in three broad points. First, every speaker emphasised the futility of addressing gender concerns in isolation, highlighting the several ways they are related to progress in several other developmental concerns and urging for greater synergy and coordination among professionals working across those domains. Second, there was a consensus that access to empowering resources such as health and education for women is likely to offer more effective and sustainable solutions for challenges to women's empowerment. Finally, it was clear that the greatest challenge against women empowerment and gender equality in South Asia appears out of entrenched patriarchal norms and unfair collective mindsets, and that these can be successfully addressed only if concerns for a gender-just society continue to be treated as an urgent political concern.














# GALLERY

# BOOK RELEASE

**An Oraon script (Tolong Siki) book by**
**Dr. Shanti Khalkho**









**'Bale' & 'Poha' Santhali collections of children's poetry**
**by Ms Chinmayee Hansdah**



# NETWORKING SESSION

## #BAATEINUNLOCKED













## OPENING CONVERSATIONS & INTERACTION ON GENDER, SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

A networking session was organised by Ms Mandira Kalaan (Campaign Director) and Ms Gurpriya Singh (Senior Campaigner) from Purpose India. All participants were given postcard-sized Bingo cards with prompts to interact with one another for half an hour, After this, the group collectively shared their learnings.

This was followed by a 20 min session on intersectionality, that examined various layers of vulnerability and marginalisation and ended with a discussion of the values that the groups collectively wanted to uphold to create and hold space for each other.














# FOUNDER'S DINNER

















> GENDER RIGHTS EQUALITY IS A HUMAN RIGHT ISSUE
>
> **MS ACHARAPAN YAVAPRAPAS**
> *CONSUL GENERAL – ROYAL THAI CONSULATE-GENERAL, KOLKATA*

# ONLINE REACH + TRAFFIC

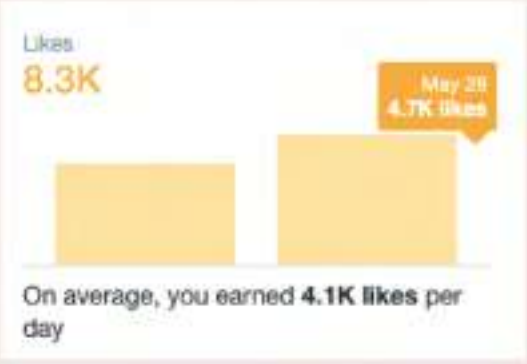
With the South Asia Women's Conference 2022 being held in hybrid mode with some speakers attending virtually or sending in recorded messages, we tried to create a social media plan that would engage with our existing community while also expanding our reach and driving new awareness. As a result, impressions were driven by posted content, including informational posts series on the speakers

# TWITTER ANALYTICS




Overall twitter engagement on @kissfoundation spiked 39% during the event.

On both May 27th and May 28th, 2022 @kissfoundation saw a substantial increase in tweet impressions, profile visits and engagements.







**4.1K**

LIKES EARNED ON AVERAGE PER DAY

**3K**

RETWEETS ON AVERAGE PER DAY, WITHOUT COMMENTS

# 37k

IMPRESSIONS EARNED OVER 2 DAYS OF THE CONFERENCE




# TOP PERFORMING TWEETS

| Tweets | Top Tweets | Tweets and replies | Promoted | Impressions | Engagements | Engagement rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KISS - Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences @kissfoundation · May 28<br>#SAWC2022 wouldn't have been as special without Smt @lakshmiunwomen's message on Planet 50-50 by 2030. Your words are still echoing in our ears. Our gratitude to you for being a part of the conference and hope to connect with you in future. #ExchangeAlumni @Dwitivikram pic.twitter.com/OCnxA0QrAV<br>View Tweet activity | | | | 10,263 | 899 | 8.8% |
| KISS - Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences @kissfoundation · May 28<br>The topic for the final session at #SAWC2022 was 'Driving the gender-responsive implementation of Agenda 2030'. Our panelists made the following points during the insightful discussion: pic.twitter.com/6dIlzK18kJ<br>View Tweet activity | | | | 5,291 | 1,208 | 22.8% |
| KISS - Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences @kissfoundation · May 27<br>The wait is over! South Asia Women's Conference 2022 is underway. Our distinguished speakers are set to enlighten us on efforts needed to remove the obstacles that women in South Asia face and move 'Towards an Equitable, Inclusive and Sustainable World'. #SAWC2022 #ExchangeAlumni pic.twitter.com/KFhsBWLyam<br>View Tweet activity | | | | 4,392 | 925 | 21.1% |

# TOP PERFORMING TWEETS















# FACEBOOK ANALYTICS




The number of people who saw content from KISS Foundation's Facebook Page, including posts, stories, and social information from people who interact with your Page and more was

**153K**




For the duration of the conference, KISS Foundation's facebook page was viewed a total of

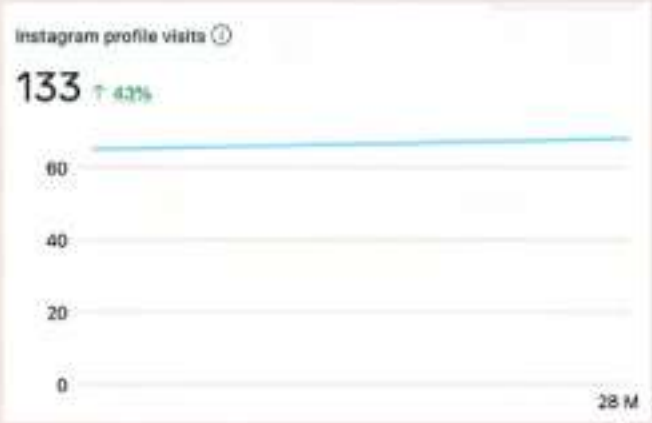
**1425**

# INSTAGRAM ANALYTICS




The number of people who saw content from KISS Foundation's Facebook Page, including posts, stories, and social information from people who interact with your Page and more was

**153K**




For the duration of the conference, KISS Foundation's facebook page was viewed a total of

**133**

# TOP PERFORMING POSTS

**All content** Ads, Posts an

| Recent content | Type | | Reach | Likes and reacti... | S |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| #SAWC2022 comes to an end! T... 28 May 09:09 | Post | | 2,046 | 461 | |
| The topic for the final session at ... 28 May 02:54 | Post | Boost post | 21,725 | 1,119 | |
| Highlights from Session 5 \| Gend... 28 May 00:07 | Post | Boost post | 25,129 | 1,081 | |
| Day 2 \| #SAWC2022 28 May 00:02 | Story | | 347 | -- | |
| Day 2 of #SAWC2022 kicks off wi... 27 May 23:05 | Post | Boost post | 20,288 | 1,101 | |
| #SAWC2022's third session was ... 27 May 06:42 | Post | Boost post | 33,754 | 1,596 | |
| #SAWC2022 Panel discussion is ... 27 May 05:08 | Story | | 353 | -- | |
| Session 2 \| 'Ending Gender-base... 27 May 04:57 | Post | Boost post | 17,083 | 1,023 | |

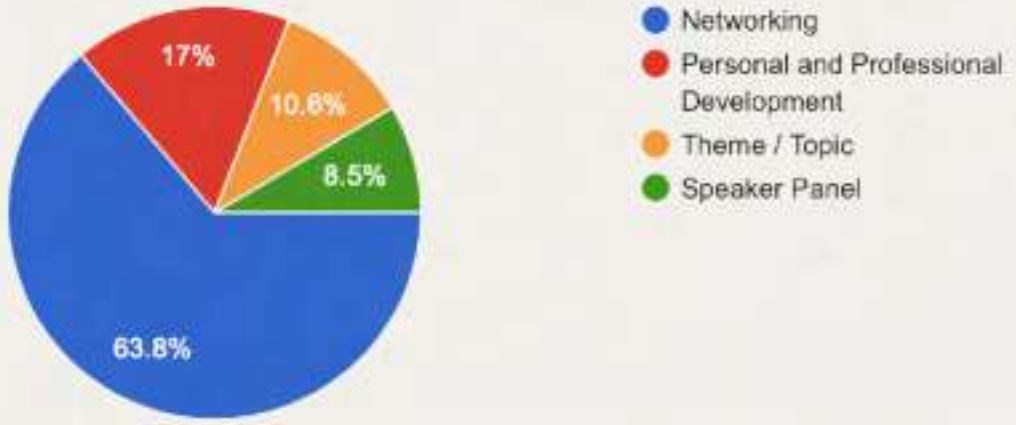
# SESSION RECORDINGS

Every session at the South Asia Women's Conference 2022 was recorded and is available on request for anyone to access. Before the end of October 2022, we will also upload all session onto the KISS Foundation Youtube Channel.

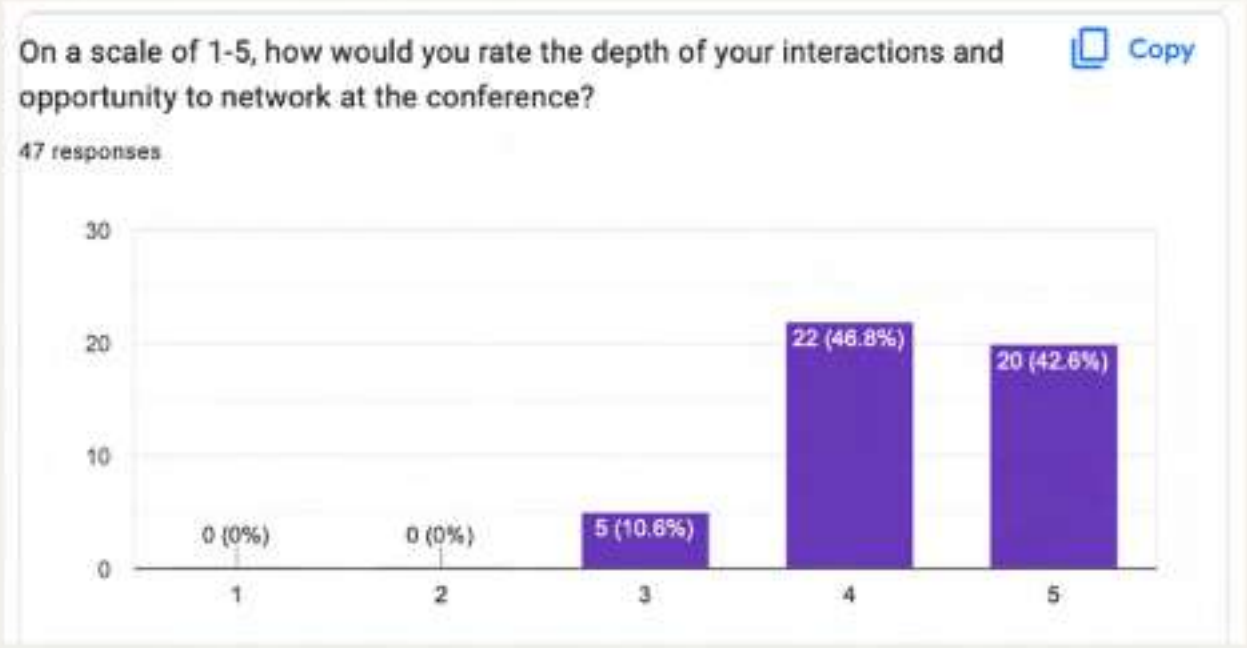
# PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

## SCOPE FOR NETWORKING

As mentioned earlier, SAWC's scope for networking was the main highlight of the event, and as such, the major reason why participants chose to attend




Notably, however, while networking was the highlight of the event, some participants indicated that they were not able to explore new connections in as much depth as they would have liked.



In a survey of potential projects or collaborations that were sparked during the conference, certain names stood out, with

- 4 candidates mentioning the Bhungroo project (Ms Trupti Jain)
- 2 candidates wanting to work with Ms Sadhana Mishra, a transgender activist
- 3 candidates wanting to work with Her Second Innings (Ms Manjula Dharmalingam)
- 2 candidates indicating interest in collaboration with UNICEF
- 2 candidates wishing to work with Ms Medha Kohli
- Several candidates indicating interest in SLAP (Mriganka Dadwal)

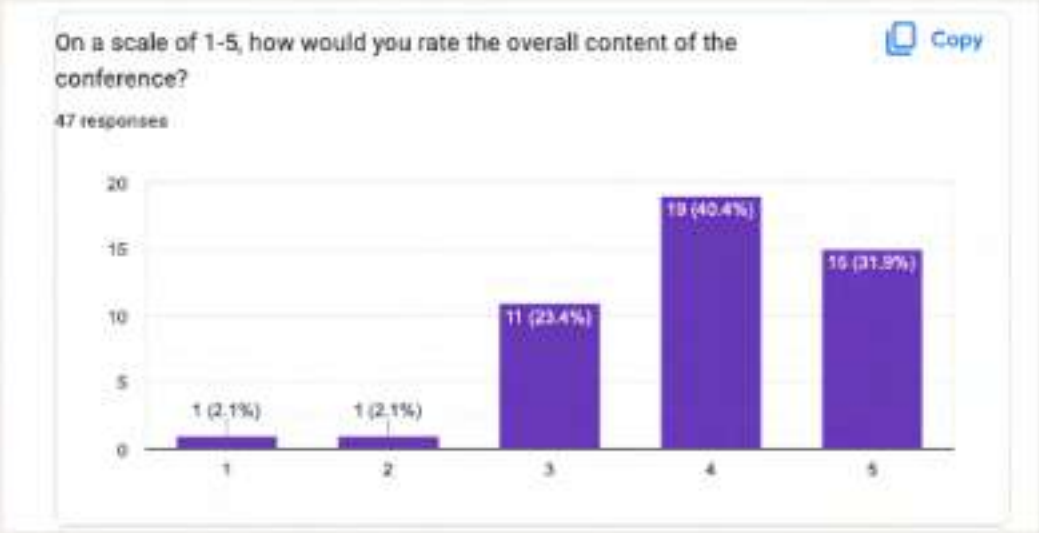
## CONTENT

Some more generic feedback comments on the scope of networking indicated an interest in exploring projects that empower women & girls in the fields of digital literacy & content, sustainable development, micro-loans and financial freedom, restorative justice interventions, the democratisation of polity, and entrepreneurship & skill training. This was further explored in a subsequent question on the feedback form, asking for **themes that can be included in future**. Participant feedback is as indicated below:

- Inclusion - focused discussion on how women from marginalized communities can be included in the mainstream gender agenda
- Some more personal networking sessions of possible. Each one should get time to discuss at length what they are doing, that makes collaborations easier.
- Women and digital media. Women Leaders in STEM field
- Online violence faced by women and Success stories of engaging men and boys towards GBV prevention
- Access to Resources and how to build partnership network among the participants could be the great way to build outcome.
- Women's labour, Entrepreneurship and Market linkage for social enterprises
- In my opinion, the conference was about south Asian women, but there wasn't any speaker from my country. It is the time where many movements are going on regarding women's rights, rape cases and punishment in Nepal. We recently went through local election and many independent women candidates were there who proved that women are now playing vital roles in politics also. That could be crucial if the conference/speakers could have talked about south Asian context rather than focusing on Indian context prominently.
- Child marriage and gender transformative approach
- Queer/LGBTIQ politics and choice

- Improving financial and market access for women micro-entrepreneurs
- 'How's in every deliberation must be given importance. (Could be implemented in future)
- Women's empowerment through skill development and innovative income-generating schemes.
- Gender-based approach towards climate and fiscal policies can be an interesting area to explore.
- Survivors of Trafficking, Women, Exploited for Sex, Begging & Drug Abuse - effects on women, and Underprivileged Women - Develop Support system & Safe Spaces.
- Gender and Climate Just e and climate finance could be interesting areas. Cultural Mapping and Assimilation
- A session on the period of Communalism and violence and the building of Youth Leadership through gender perspective would have been more timely.
- Role/Status of Women in politics
- Intersectionality like caste, religion, third gender for a more inclusive and sustainable development policy formulation
- Political leadership
- The diversity of topics and voices we heard in relation to achieving gender equality was very impressive.
- Girl Child & Trans People issues
- Value addition business or Entrepreneurship
- It's sufficient but speakers should prepare their presentation by analyzing the findings of South Asian countries. Most of the information and discussion are based on the Indian context only. That might slightly need more preparation from speakers
- Women health issues
- Trafficking issues - solutions, addictions and Drug abuse in women; women suffering from addiction in the family
- More success stories of women empowerment at grassroots level
- Yes, we could have added a collaborative future plan from the network established thereby. Like collaboratively, we can do for the women of South Asia.
- Gender and Politics
- For a women's conference, the topics were fine. One topic that could be added is impact assessment and measurement. This is a very tricky area in women's empowerment - how do measure empowerment and estimate the impact of a project on improving empowerment?

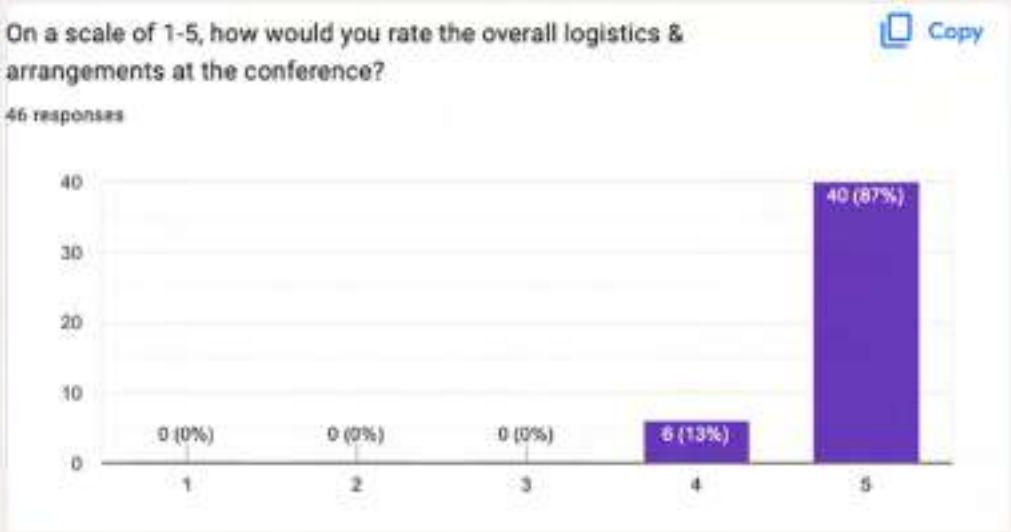
- Sectoral topics with a Gendered Lens in Health and Law would be extremely meaningful to discuss. Discussions especially around legal provisions for women are usually educational both at professional and personal levels.
- Leadership, Advocacy, Scaling up, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Content on how to close the gender gap, women and the future of work, and women in leadership. You could also look at discussing government interventions and existing good practices across South Asia.




This feedback is perhaps best encapsulated in the chart shown above, with varying responses and levels of satisfaction about the content of the conference.

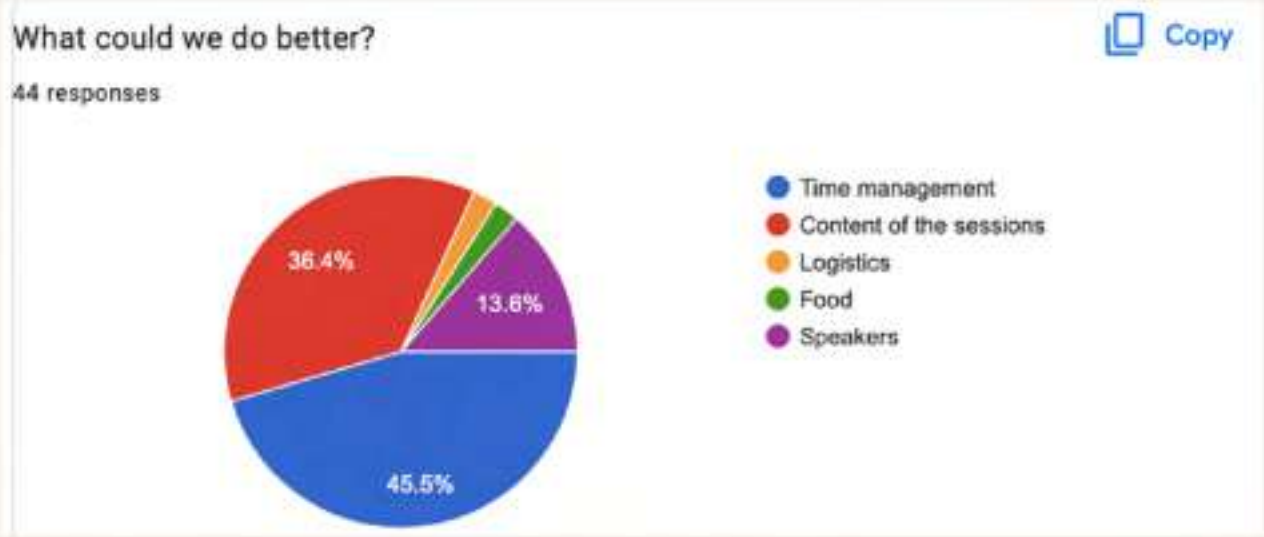
## LOGISTICS

Nearly 90% of survey respondents were satisfied with the overall logistics and arrangements of the conference. Accommodation for the conference had been arranged by KISS and KIIT at the KIIT Guest house in Patia, Bhubaneswar.



# SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Overall, feedback indicated that the time management and content of the conference could be improved, with a call for better selection of speakers and in particular, better moderators.




## TIME MANAGEMENT & CONFERENCE DESIGN

"Ideally we could have managed the group-based discussion using multiple track options would have been a great outcome. Next time pls make design thinking-based workshop to get the contribution. Happy to facilitate the entire planning along with other members of required.. The current execution of multiple panels didn't allow two-way communication for the audience. "

"Better time management so that there is enough time for interactions after a panel discussion "

"Everything was perfect except a little better time management for participants interaction with speaker. Few of the speakers went on sharing their story rather than enlightenment on the given topics."

"Re-think panel format and build in more time to network and have in-depth conversations. More breakaway sessions, smaller groups with deeper engagement etc. "

"In future better to add 2 more days that's will be group work then the network will be increase"

"I think panel discussions are not the best format to promote networking. Perhaps break out rooms with moderated discussions on particular topics. Give more opportunity for each participant to talk about their work in depth."

"The content and the design of the conference itself could have been better. I wasn't able to see a larger direction or vision for the conference, since a lot of the content was being delivered to folks who were already working in many of these diverse fields. The time duration for the panels also didn't seem enough, and it also rushed the conversations into the already busy schedule of the back-to-back panels. It felt a bit like the panellist themselves were speaking to an audience of panellists.

"The stay arrangements, transport, food, and hospitality at the conference were exceptional. Also, the choice of topics were well spread out to cover major issues related to the theme of the conference. The choice of speakers was also great. However, something that could be done better is: have fewer panelists in each panel or increase the time of the panel to 90 minutes (instead of 60 minutes); make the format of all sessions similar (in some panels, speakers were allowed to use PPT and others they were not); and finally, have slightly more in- depth conversation on the topic to allow for theory building and documentation. "

"Also, there were not spaces of interaction for all the participants and perhaps they could have been structured with visits to organisations or by learning through exposure instead of listening to speakers all day."

## SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

"I think one of the most important things for a conference of this magnitude is collaborations yes, but also being able to share the work we've done with the communities our organisation interacts with. For this, an active social media team, that's tagging us, our organisations is essential. It should've been thought of. A LOT of scope here. Even for individuals who want to use for professional development. There has to be LinkedIn posting too."

## PARTICIPANT PROFILES

"The conference comprised of women leaders and activists who already believe and work for the cause. I believe that one of the biggest short-comings of the conference was the absence of the policy makers and the government in the discussion. A discussion on policy making in south asia is incomplete without the presence of policy makers. Secondly, even though the private sector representatives were present, it was too less compared to the overall participation. It would be great to have more panelists from these two stakeholder categories. "

"have a more gender balance, more men and members from the LGBQT community "

"It was a well-planned and well-organised Conference; more voices from subaltern and marginalised sections should be included."

"Involve relevant stakeholders in the ecosystem and strong platform for networking "

"More countries should have participated"

"Continue to create opportunities for networking and learning. Include grassroots women workers in the discussions"

## MODERATORS

"Moderator should be given guideline on how to conduct session. Setting of agenda of two day after the inaugural should have been done. "

"Timing, better moderators who only moderate a panel and don't use it to speak themselves, curating a more engaging medium in the form of a workshop for people to actually lead this exchange in a more productive manner. "

"Better moderation, better use of panel time"

"There should be depth in the content , choose speakers who have lots of experience, Give more time for deliberations "

## TRAVEL

"It was an excellent Management overall. I got a very good opportunity for learning, sharing and networking. However, if the management team has provided bit more time to explore Bhubaneswor, it would be good not only for participants but also it would have promoted the tourism of the city."

"Very satisfied with everything. Just one opinion as we come from different country this is always our wish to have side visit . So from my perspective of there was one more day just for outing it would be so nice"

"Schedule is very tight. 1 day need to explore the place, best practices of the city need to include"

## FOLLOW-UP

"Continue to create opportunities for networking and learning. Include grassroot women workers in the discussions"

"What could be improved? While we deliberated on issues faced by us collectively, we got inspired by success stories of some fantastic community leaders and change-makers, I believe the collective potential of such a powerful gathering has scope for further harnessing by dedicating a free-thinking session only and only to solutions and resolutions. Possibly even come up with a 10-point agenda to meet the goals we set for ourselves __ could be anything hashtags, online or offline follow-ups -- something that sustains the spark we witnessed during the formal/informal discussions."

"Please continue this opportunity in future to create spaces for activists for their sharing and learning"

"Sharing successful stories, and personal achievements are of course motivating, but lacking in rigour. We must continue with small sessions/meetings regularly to research the reasons why we are far behind reaching our goals, particularly Goal 17 and we must give emphasis on finding 'ways and means' to achieve it. Deep empirical knowledge is the need now "

"You can organise many such conferences in various topics to motivate and support the persons who are working in development sectors to support underprivileged communities."

"It should further continue with the same group so that in the next meeting, all will able to connect and share their progress as an output of this conference "

"Continue the ripple formed due to this meeting. Webinars are appreciated"

"The regular zoom meeting can be proceeded to keep the updates of the network."

"Let's please keep ourselves connected through the whatsApp groups created and all the speakers should be made a part of the group if everyone agrees. "

## LOGISTICS

About logistic: if international people are traveling via Delhi airport, please make sure the transfer period is more than 2 hours.

## FOLLOW UP PROJECTS

More details about funding opportunities for projects



# GENERAL APPRECIATION

SAWC team was a great host. May be we can have one session where we engage with students.

Thank you so much dear Management team, all the respected authorities and all the great people who provided this huge platform to me. I had great experience of learning, sharing and networking. I kindly hope you will always be there and I will be providing such opportunities in the days to come too. Thank you very much dear all once again.

Grateful to US consulate Hyderabad for the opportunity to participate, Thankful to KISS & KIIT for organizing the meeting so well. You have given an AT HOME Experience.

Thanks for the organisers especially Mr. Senthil Thirupati and Mr. Salil Kader from US Consulate General Hyderabad who made it possible with their never ending involvement and commitment to the cause. Thanks again to all others who are in the organising committee for a wonderful platform and deliberations.

Hospitality was top notch. I couldn't have imagined better arrangements for the conference. The best thing about any conference is the time and opportunity it allows for the delegates to interact - this conference had ample of them, such as Founder's Dinner, Trip to Konark, Bingo. Please continue doing that.

Thank you Everyone . And I am so impressed and empowered by KIIT and KISS history. As being indigenous woman i can feel the pain and the needs of indigenous community. I am so impressed by KISS story and I have written about it on my Facebook to empower our young indigenous by the story of KISS .

Great conference–exceptionally high-level plenary/keynote addresses, well-chosen for conference context.

Thanks so much for all your thoughtful and practical organization. I am always impressed with the commitment and efficiency of those who plan this conference

The location of the conference was picturesque. The natural beauty & silence of the place inspired us all.

After two days of living together, sharing feelings & experiences, and explaining ideas together & massages turned a disparate group of individuals into an extended family. Much love & affection flowed.

Thanks to the new bonds, The conference has become the best way to create solidarity & networks at the South Asian level.

The program was very well organised. The arrangements, logistics and hospitality are simply excellent. Loved the smiling faces and humble attitude of each and every member of the organizing team. Big kudos to all of them

Magnificent impressive conference. Every inch-square of venue is meaningfully illustrated the theme of conference. Organization is excellent. Nothing is left in establishing an IMPRESSION in heights and depth.








SOUTH ASIA
WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE
2022



EQUITABLE
INCLUSIVE



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SOUTH ASIA
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# 2022 COHORT


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