# WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

## ARTHAN

IN COLLABORATION WITH

## THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

"

*Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.*
*- Kofi Annan*

"

# INDEX

# FOREWORD

While gender inequality persists in traditional entrepreneurship, social enterprises also appear to experience discrepancies, although fewer, between men and women in terms of positions, salaries, and growth opportunities. The female representation in India is 26 percent of full-time social enterprise employees with the share of women among non-profit CEOs being only 43 percent, with greater inequality in numbers and compensation at larger organizations. Furthermore, only 18% of the largest nonprofits have female CEOs. Social enterprises were set up to enable fairer economies. Therefore, it would be fitting to understand the extent to which these enterprises are addressing this inequality and creating an equitable system that empowers more women.

But of equal importance, and not talked about nearly as often, is that women who are a part of the workplace face unique challenges, such as pay disparity, returning to the workforce post-childbirth, safety while working in high-risk areas, lack of investor trust, and so on. Regardless of whether a woman is a social or business entrepreneur, she has to negotiate through an ecosystem that has traditionally been structured for men to succeed. In the context of these real structural inequalities, it is perhaps predictable to find that social enterprises reflect many of the same issues we find in other areas of the economy.

So many organisations in the development sector work from diverse angles to improve the lives and ensure the rights of women across the country. There are an estimated two million social enterprises in India, about a third of which (more than 600,000) focus on empowering women and girls as the primary beneficiaries of their social mission. However, the same does not reflect in funding for women-led causes, which is a cause of concern.

Globally, only 1% of gender equality funding goes toward women-led organizations. Hence, as a sector committed to putting people first, it becomes imperative to create structures, systems, and collaborations that support and promote gender equality in the workplace as well as women working on these issues.

Understanding the gravity of the challenge and the need for conscious action, a few months ago, Arthan in collaboration with The Rockefeller Foundation, embarked on a journey to delve deep into the topic of Women's Leadership in the Development Sector (WLIDS). What began as a series of interviews of women leaders in the development sector to chronicle and learn from their journeys has now given way to an extensive research study. The study includes interviews and surveys with over 50+ women leaders across India and organisations in the impact sector including NGOs, CSR, foundations, research institutes, intermediaries, funding organisations, social enterprises, and so on. This has been coupled with many conversations with men in the development sector to gain insights across the board. The study also conducted a macro survey directed at all genders and across all demographics to get varied insights on what they think about WLIDS, supported by secondary research.

We believe this study to be an important step to plan gender pathways within organizations for them to emerge as gender transformative workplaces, to enable women who are looking to navigate their path to leadership, as well as for men, who can be instrumental in supporting the growth of women leaders towards enabling a better understanding of the challenges that women face on the path to leadership development and co-create solutions to overcome existing challenges.

In July earlier this year, this collaboration curated a series of sessions to start a dialogue with a diverse set of stakeholders in the sector who could shed light on specific issues pertaining to women's development, and the conversations and learnings from the day have led to further discussions on diversity and inclusion. Beyond this study, we aim to build a platform to support women's leadership in the development sector by creating a network of women leaders who can support one another as well as budding leaders and, providing leadership capacity-building support while continuing the efforts on building research and evidence.

To close with a quote, "Let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights, once and for all". These were the words spoken by the then First Lady of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in 1995. More than two decades later, progress has been made, but it is not enough. The pandemic has only deepened the burden on women and girls - from violence, falling labor force participation in India, the additional burden of managing work and home, falling behind in school, and so on. The work needed to make this world an equal place for all genders cannot and will not stop. Times and circumstances may change but the endeavour towards equality must go on.

We need to ensure women's empowerment is fostered through an inclusive mainstream economic agenda and social entrepreneurial solutions that offset gender-specific constraints. This report has shown that social enterprises hold great potential as a tool for enabling women's empowerment. Recommendations drawn together in this report can act as a catalyst to increase the effectiveness of social enterprises as a model for supporting women's empowerment.

Deepali Khanna
Managing Director, Asia
The Rockefeller Foundation

> **Any society that fails to harness the energy and creativity of its women is at a huge disadvantage in the modern world.**
> **- Tian Wei**

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The role of women employees and entrepreneurs in the process of growth of an organisation can not be understated; several research studies have indicated that women-led companies outperform those led by men. For instance, an analysis found that women CEOs in the Fortune 1000 drove three times the returns as S&P 500 enterprises run predominantly by men ([1])

Research continually indicates that gender diversity results in increased productivity, greater innovation, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction. Having a balanced proportion of women in executive roles is not only fair, but it is good for business and employees. As per a Dasra report ([2]), a study of the top 100 Indian companies (BSE 100) showed that companies with women on their boards performed better.

However, the impact sector in India, that trailblazes work around gender equality, still has a long, long way to go before it becomes truly gender inclusive. Dasra's study of 300+ social organisations in India found that two thirds of organisations have an under-representation of women when it comes to positions from managers and above, and the difference is starker as the organisations grow in size. This is a grossly low representation of women in the impact sector workforce. Further, the statistics stated above do not even begin to take into account a number of unique challenges that women face, when they actually become a part of the workplace.

While some of these challenges are overt and are seen in the form of pay disparity, sexual harassment and so on; others are driven by biases, both conscious and unconscious, in various organisational processes and practices, beginning right from the time of recruitment.

2- In Sight - Why Grantmakers In India Need A Gender Lens, published by Dasra, March 2016

Understanding the depth of challenges faced by women in the development sector, Arthan, in collaboration with The Rockefeller Foundation, decided to conduct an in-depth research on the topic, the result of which is this report on Women's Leadership in the Development Sector (WLIDS).

This study aims to serve as a guide to plan gender pathways within organisations in order for them to emerge as gender transformative. It is also meant to inspire women who are navigating their path to leadership, as well as to educate and sensitise men, who can be instrumental in supporting the growth of women leaders. The study outlines actionable steps that organisations can take to make their workforce more gender inclusive and enable better representation and participation of women at the workplace.

To complement the study, a series of knowledge sessions on the topic are planned in 2020, with the launch of the same on 14th July, 2020. The event on 14th July 2020 covered topics such role of men as allies, gender mainstreaming, funding for women-led organisations, women working in conflict zones and evidence-based solutions to challenges in women's leadership with speakers across organisations such as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Boston Consulting Group, SEWA Bharat, Malala Fund, India Development Review, Indian School of Public Policy, Janaagraha, EdelGive Foundation, Mann Deshi Foundation, Dasra and many others.

These sessions were curated to enable organisations to begin a dialogue, and create a space for actionable steps, leading to the strengthening of organisations and the sector as a whole in the context of women's development, using these learnings to strengthen their policies, practices and programs. The day saw the participation of 23 speakers and 265 attendees.

# ABOUT THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

**PART A**

We have divided the trajectory of a woman's life journey into different phases, to identify and shed light on the different challenges she faces as a part of each phase. This is an indicative life journey of a woman and does not imply that all women should, or do, go through the same phases.

We used data and information from our interviews with 50+ women leaders in the development sector, a survey completed by 100+ development sector professionals, secondary data and conversations with male leaders.

For the solutions shared, we have taken into account the best practices of different organisations as shared by all the women and men we interviewed as well as by different individuals as part of the survey. This has been backed by secondary research from multiple sources.

We share individual case studies of 50+ women leaders from the impact sector, who we interviewed, in an attempt to chronicle their journeys and share the opportunities, challenges and experiences, that led them to becoming the leaders they are today. We hope that their stories will serve as a source of inspiration and learning for many aspiring leaders in the sector, as they plan their journeys in the workplace.

**PART B**

" *I by no means intend to simplify the challenges women face in any culture. Women are marginalised in all cultures in my opinion, some in more extreme ways than others.*
*- Zainab Salbi* "

# PART A: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

Part A of the study walks us through the life journey of a woman, highlighting the nuanced and unique challenges and biases that come her way and what can be done to mitigate these challenges and work towards a more gender inclusive ecosystem.
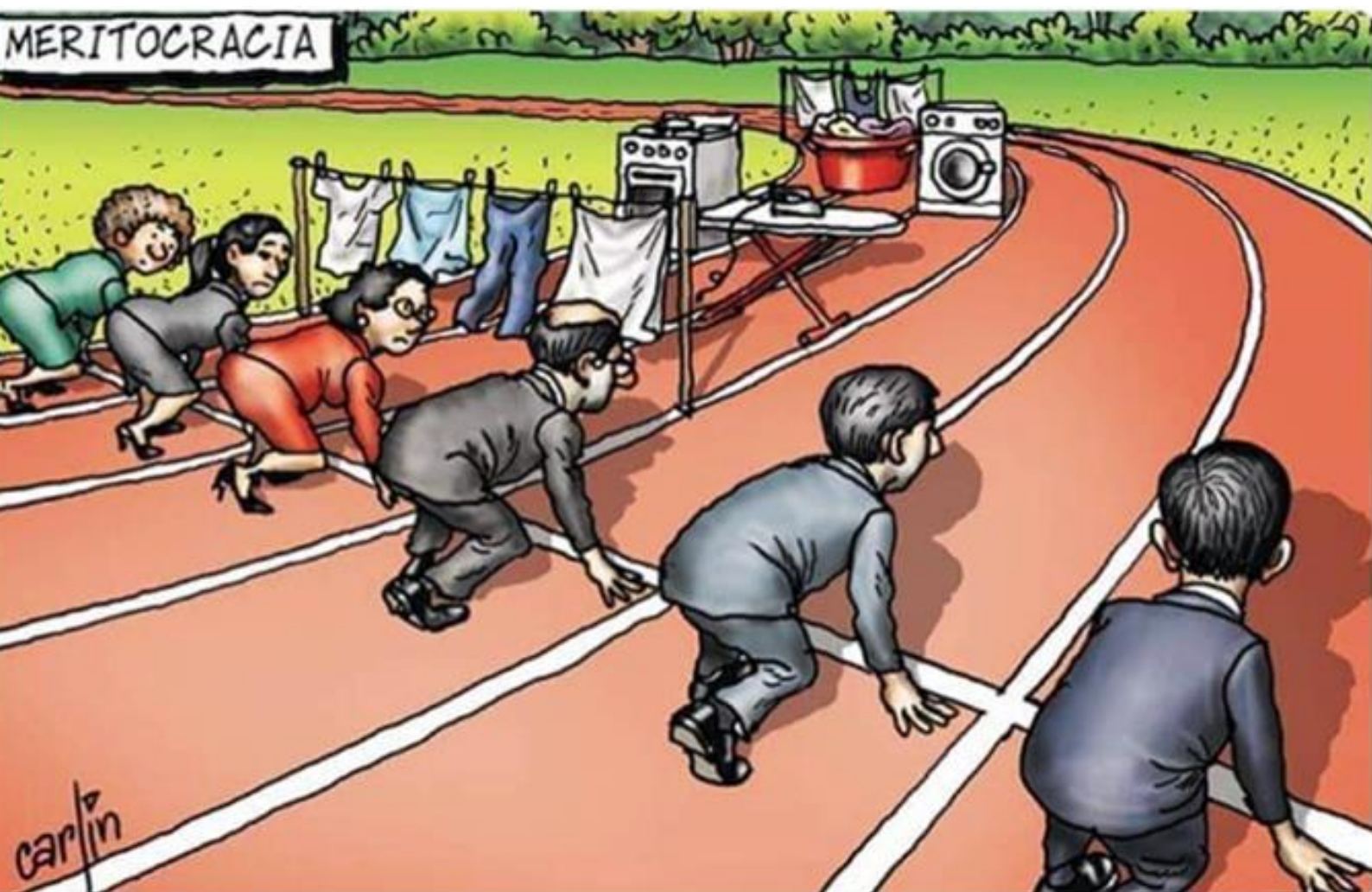
" Peace in patriarchy is war against women. - Maria Mies "

# PHASE I: EARLY LIFE AND CHILDHOOD

We will not be able to see gender parity in our lifetimes- the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 reveals that gender parity will not be attained for the next 99.5 years. No country has yet achieved absolute equality in terms of gender. Close to 80% of the world's total female population lives in countries with "poor" or "very poor" levels of gender equality, despite ongoing efforts to bridge the gap. Young girls around the world are gravely impacted by gender inequality. (3)

## 12 MILLION

GLOBALLY

## 60 MILLION
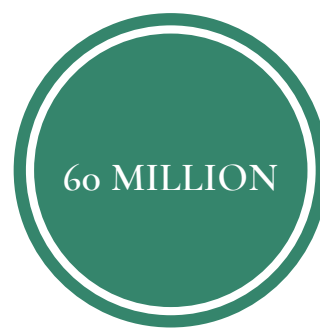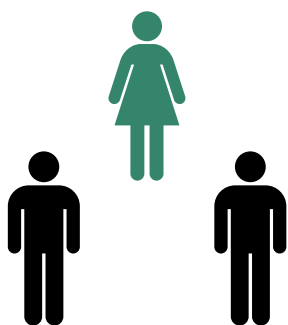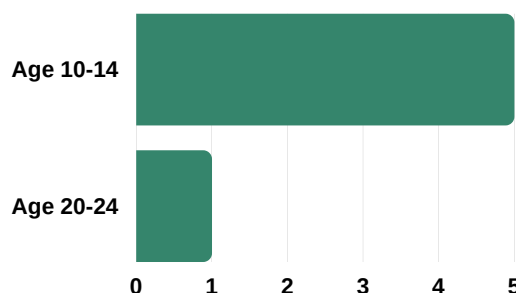
GIRLS ARE MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 (4)

GIRLS ARE OUT OF SCHOOL (5)

COMPARED TO YOUNG BOYS, YOUNG GIRLS DO TWICE THE AMOUNT OF WORK AT HOME (6)

Age 10-14

Age 20-24

0   1   2   3   4   5

EARLY PREGNANCY CARRIES FIVE TIMES A HIGHER RISK OF ILLNESS AND DEATH (7)

# 132/187

## INDIA'S RANK ON GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX (GII)

# 2,332

## AVERAGE DAILY SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN THE COUNTRY, MAKING IT THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD (8)

## 41% OF WOMEN AGED 15-49 HAVE NEVER BEEN TO SCHOOL COMPARED TO 18% OF MEN (9)

## 1 IN EVERY 3 CHILD BRIDES IS FROM INDIA (10)

The inequalities described above are much more pronounced and visible for girls belonging to developing countries and low income families. While patriarchy as an institution impacts both girls and boys from an early age, it is much more endangering and life threatening for young women.

As can be seen above, the 'field' already begins on an unequal terrain for girls and women, who spend much of their life catching up, to reach the level playing field. Many young girls, who do not see this extreme side of patriarchy, still face challenges such as educational inequality, sexism, unequal opportunities, and so on, putting them at a disadvantage much before they even enter the workforce.

**"** *When women are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous. -Michelle Obama* **"**

# PHASE II: EDUCATION

According to the 2011 Census of India, the overall rate of literacy for the country was 73%. However, while the rate of literacy for men was 80.9%, for women it was only 64.6%. This literacy rate as well as the causes of the illiteracy amongst women differ across the different regions and cultures across India. Female literacy rate in urban areas is higher as compared to rural India, while the more populated states (eg: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) showed lower levels of female literacy.

Women who are educated:

- Are more likely to have fewer children
- Are less likely to die during pregnancy/ childbirth
- Are more likely to send their children to school
- Are more likely to have healthier children
- Are instrumental in the growth of a nation and in helping increase the GDP of the economy

The patriarchal mindset in India is one of the major reasons behind the low literacy rate of women. In many families, boys are given priority in terms of education. This belief stems from the deep-rooted idea that women are primarily caregivers while men are the breadwinners in any family. Lack of access to proper education automatically denies many women the access and the opportunity to avail many career opportunities, thereby, denying them an entry into the workforce.

Women's enrolment in higher education, which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence, has risen to 48.6% in 2018-19 (11). Females per 100 male students have also increased significantly in central universities, deemed universities, and government-aided institutions.

## HOWEVER

Fields such as engineering and technology still remain male-dominated. Representation of women in the said fields in India mirrors the global trend. While progress is being made, much more needs to be done.
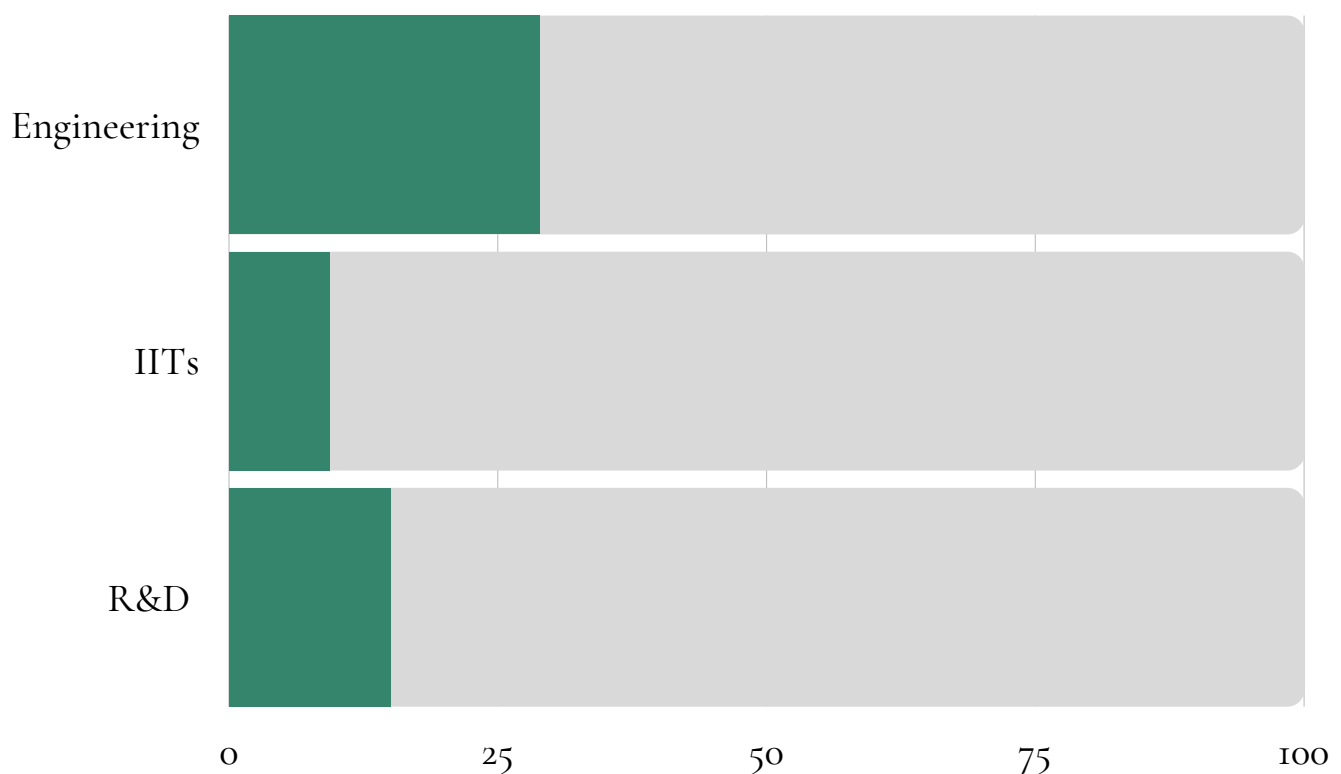


Green represents the proportion of female students and grey represents the proportion of male students (12)

**"**

*If you exclude 50% of the talent pool, it is no wonder that you find yourself in a war for talent. -Theresa J. Whitmarsh*

**"**

# PHASE III: JOINING THE WORKFORCE

When women enter the workforce, they are already entering an unequal landscape; an ecosystem that has traditionally been structured for men to succeed. This is true even for the most privileged, educated women.

From biases in hiring, personal questions about marriage and maternity, harassment during work, pay disparity, returning to the workforce post child birth, safety while working in high risk areas, lack of investor trust; women face multiple challenges. This also leads to the question of additional challenges for women who might not come with such privilege, education or receive support at home. According to our survey, 88% individuals believe that women are at a disadvantage in the professional world.

We begin with the challenges women face in their first step towards joining the workforce i.e. the recruitment process.

There are traces of recruitment bias with respect to gender throughout the process, starting from where and how people are recruited. Some of the ways in which recruitment bias is perpetuated but can be overlooked are shared further.
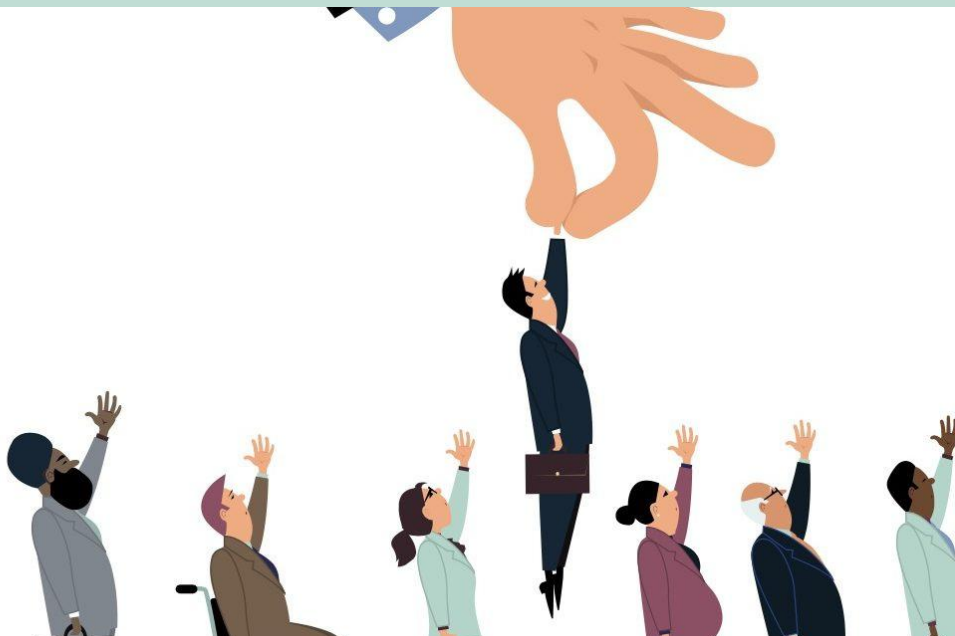
## JOB DESCRIPTION (JD)

The language used in JDs can have unconscious bias. Words like 'aggressive' attract men and defer women from applying. Women tend to apply for jobs where they meet most of the eligibility criteria, as opposed to men who feel more confident in applying for roles even if they do not meet all the eligibility criteria. Hence, if the JD has very specific requirements that a woman does not fulfil, she will end up not applying. The same is seldom true for men.

## CV ROUND

Many employers may prefer men as subconsciously they believe that men make better leaders and performers as they are considered to be more ambitious, less likely to take decisions based on their emotions, and less likely to be bogged down by familial responsibilities. This bias reduces the chances of a woman qualifying the CV round almost by half, the second the recruiter sees her name on the CV.(13)

## INTERVIEW ROUND

During interviews, many women are asked questions related to their plans for marriage and children, something that male candidates are almost never asked. According to the survey Arthan conducted, ~50% of female applicants have been asked extremely personal questions about their plans for marriage and children during the interview process. Other than this, due to the inherent bias that women are more emotional, they are also asked questions around their assertiveness, emotional control and leadership.

## HIRING TEAM

According to the Harvard Business Review, having the same social identity can impact hiring choices, which is why women are more likely to hire more women, and men are more likely to hire more men. Hence, if the hiring team is all male, there is a very little chance that the recruitment process would be gender inclusive. A hiring team should ideally have equal representation from all genders in order to ensure a more open and inclusive hiring process.

# PHASE IV: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

## PHASE IV.I: BIASES IN PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT, PROMOTION AND PAY DISPARITY

This section sheds light on the challenges, biases and inequalities that are prevalent in the processes pertaining to performance management and assessment. Some of these are unconscious and some of them are conscious, but they all end up disproportionately impacting a woman's ability to achieve success at the workplace.

**" When we pay women less than men we're telling women their work isn't as valuable. We're all equally valuable. And we should be paid equally. -Maria Shriver "**

# A: PERFORMANCE SUPPORT BIAS

This bias takes place when managers provide different opportunities to different individuals based on their gender, due to the inherent or subconscious bias that comes as a result of gendered traits such as 'decisiveness', 'strength', 'empathy' etc.

Managers have a big impact on how employees view their day-to-day opportunities and employees are more likely to believe they have equal opportunities for growth and development when their manager helps them, and advocates for new opportunities for them. Hence, an important aspect of overall performance support includes mentoring and offering one-on-one support to employees by the managers. This becomes more important in the case of women where one-on-one support can often help them navigate through male-dominated workspaces and balance home and work better. For the same reason, mentoring opportunities help increase retention rates of women. As per our survey, 56% women consider mentoring to be an important part in their professional journey.

According to a survey, ~60% of male managers are uncomfortable mentoring, socialising with, working one-on-one with, and traveling with female colleagues ([14]). Given that most senior teams comprise of men, this leads to an unfair disadvantage for women in their teams who may miss many strategic work opportunities as a result of this.

# B: PERFORMANCE REVIEW BIAS

This bias takes place when performance is reviewed differently for different genders due to the subconscious biases underlying the review process; Harvard Business Review found that performance reviews are inherently biased (15). General and open-ended questions during reviews pose the problem. When the criteria for evaluations are ambiguous, bias is more prevalent. As studies show (16), if there is no structure, people rely on their stereotypes while making decisions
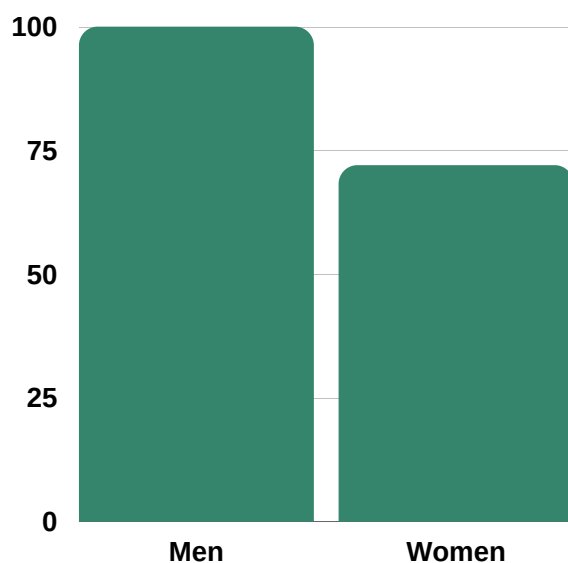
Without controlling for any gender differences in characteristics, one study finds that for every 100 men promoted, only 72 women are promoted- a statistically significant gender gap in promotion rates favoring men. (17)

A study shows that progress at the top is constrained by a broken rung- which is the first step up to manager. Due to this, fewer women end up getting managerial positions. (18)

Women are often scrutinised more than their male colleagues, as a result of which they feel the need to prove themselves over and over again, leading to low confidence and self doubt. According to the survey conducted by Arthan, ~50% women had been passed over for a promotion that they rightfully deserved over a male colleague.

# C: PERFORMANCE REWARD BIAS

This bias takes place when individuals belonging to different genders are rewarded differently for the same job done. The differentiation can be in the form of rewards such as pay, leading to pay disparity.
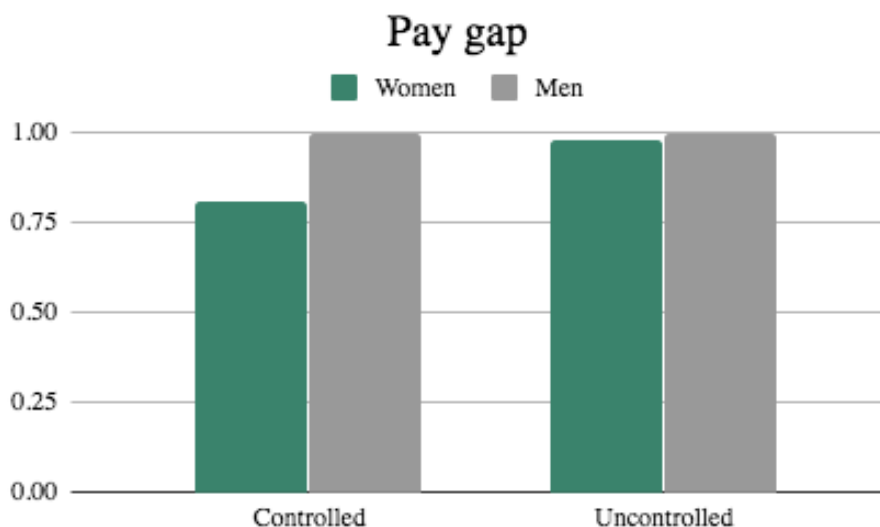
## Pay gap



Women make only $0.81 -$0.98 for every $1 a man makes.

Pay gap can lead to lost earnings up to $80,000 for women. The difference is grave if the investment and interest value of the pay gap is considered over time. ([19](#))

In looking at the career progression for women holistically, the gender pay gap widens as women move up the ladder. Women move up the career ladder at a pace slower than men, which is called the opportunity gap. When considering the gender pay gap, one must account for the fact that more women are segregated to lower-level jobs in low-paying industries and as a whole, are still underrepresented in high paying jobs and leadership roles. The survey conducted by Arthan corroborates with these findings. As per the survey, more than 40% women have been on the receiving end of pay disparity.

There is a difference between male and female led organisations when it comes to performance reward bias. A study found that men are more likely to be promoted by men, and women are more likely to be promoted by women ([20](#)). The survey by Dasra validated this claim as it found that in women-led organisations, 75% of female employees have managerial roles, whereas only 15% of female employees have managerial roles in men-led organisations.

**"**

*Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture.*

*- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

**"**

# PHASE IV: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

## PHASE IV.II: CULTURE AND SAFETY

The culture of an organisation plays an important role in creating a safe and respectful workplace, conducive to productivity and growth. How gender inclusive an organisation is and how strictly the gender related policies are followed in the organisation, is dependent on the culture of the organisation. An unhealthy, sexist or unsafe environment can prevent many women from participating actively, being efficient employees and can even encourage them to quit. Some of the organisational factors that prevent women from advancing stem from the people, culture and policies. According to our survey, ~35% respondents do not believe that their organisational culture is conducive for a woman's growth.

# A: HARASSMENT

Harassment at the workplace could take different forms – verbal, non-verbal, physical and sexual. In addition to sexual harassment, there are many other forms of violations including bullying, involuntary increase in working hours, cyber bullying and psychological abuse. Some examples of the same would include hearing sexist jokes, being touched in an inappropriate way, and receiving unsolicited attempts for an intimate relationship. According to the survey conducted by Arthan, 68% individuals believe that safety concerns become a hindrance to professional development for women.

While it is difficult to quantify the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace due to the varying definitions and perceptions of sexual harassment and reluctance of the harassed to report their experiences, studies have revealed that sexual harassment at workplace is a reality for a large number of women (21). More than 30% of women face sexual harassment at the workplace and the number of registered cases increased by 54% between 2014 and 2017 in India.

Research shows that sexual harassment in the workplace can increase employee turnover. It was found that targets of harassment were 6.5 times as likely to change jobs. Costs related to employee turnover constitute the largest economic cost of sexual harassment. There is substantial research to show that workplace sexual harassment is associated with reduced motivation and commitment, as well as lower job satisfaction and withdrawal. (22)
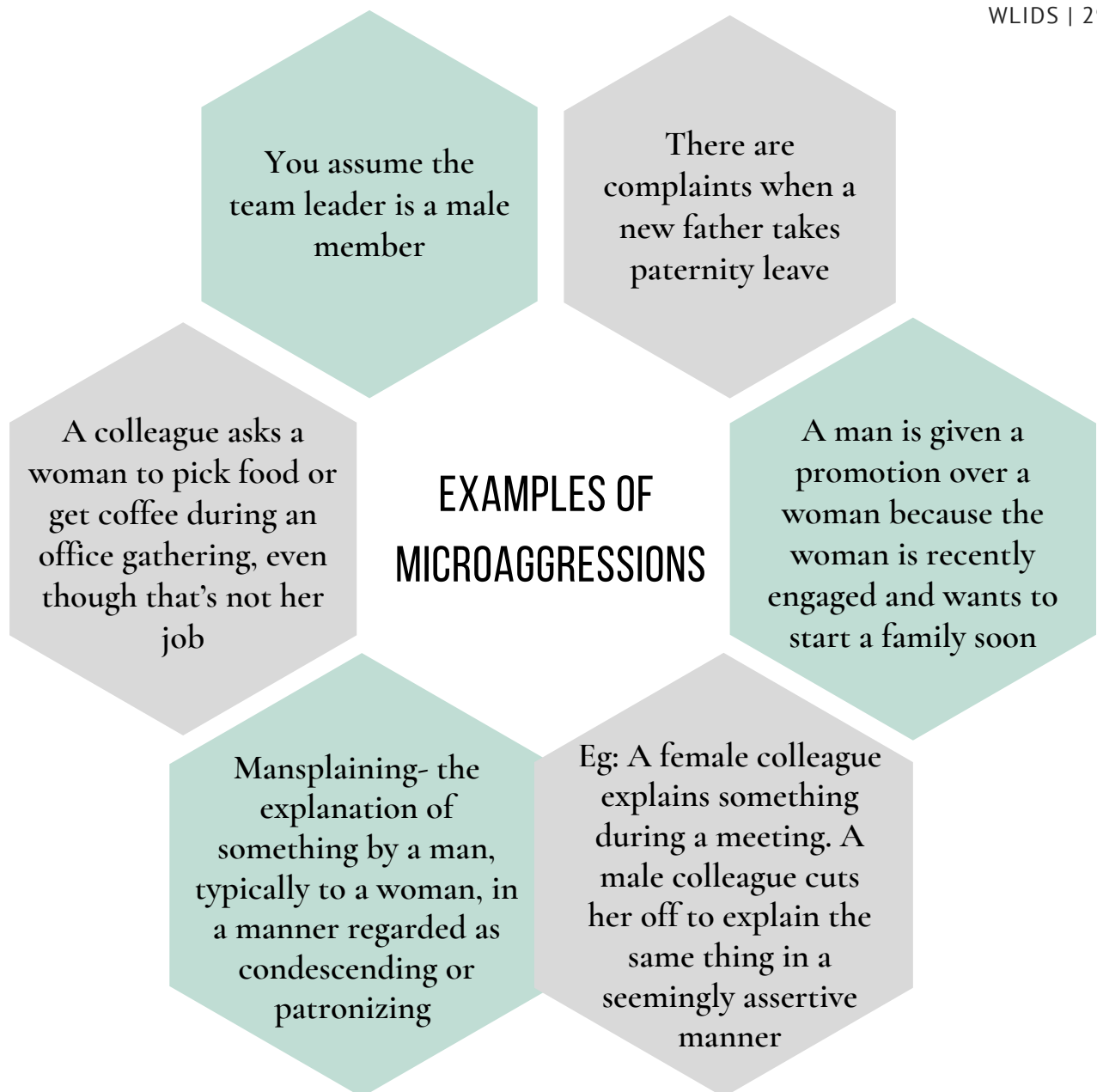
While the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) Act was introduced as a means to reduce harassment, it is seen that 75% of women face retaliation after reporting harassment to their employers (23). Hence, the success of the Act depends on how much the culture of the organisation promotes and actively ensures the internalisation and smooth implementation of the same.

# B: UNSAID BIASES AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Women face many unsaid and unconscious biases that are perpetuated from a very young age. Biases such as girls not being good at math, being over-emotional, being 'too bossy' or 'too aggressive', are often manifested in non-malicious ways, almost becoming the norm. These impact how women think and conduct themselves at the workplace, with their teams and the wider organisation.

These unconscious biases are called microaggressions. Whether intentional or unintentional, they signal disrespect. Microaggressions come in many different forms such as being overlooked (being interrupted or spoken over, not being heard, others taking credit for your idea), being disrespected (hearing demeaning remarks about you or people like you, hearing others' surprise at your language skills or other abilities) or having your competence questioned (needing to provide more evidence of your competence, having your judgment questioned in your area of expertise). Women are far more likely to experience this everyday discrimination.

While 73 percent of women and 59 percent of men have experienced at least one type of microaggression, these are more common for women. Women are almost twice as likely as men to experience four or more types of microaggressions (24). Harvard's global online research study, which included over 200,000 participants, showed that 76% of people (men and women) are gender-biased and tend to think of men as better suited for careers and women as better suited as homemakers. Such biases can manifest in the form of microaggressions (25).

**EXAMPLES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS**

You assume the team leader is a male member

There are complaints when a new father takes paternity leave

A colleague asks a woman to pick food or get coffee during an office gathering, even though that's not her job

A man is given a promotion over a woman because the woman is recently engaged and wants to start a family soon

Mansplaining- the explanation of something by a man, typically to a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing

Eg: A female colleague explains something during a meeting. A male colleague cuts her off to explain the same thing in a seemingly assertive manner

## C: SAFETY

Other barriers to safety that impede a woman's ability to work efficiently and effectively include :

- Late night or early morning travel brings in safety concerns, whether the travel is within the city, within the country or international.
- Venue for post-work events, if isolated or far away can be a cause of safety concern or deter a woman from attending.
- Accomodation for women travelling outstation-the venue of the hotel they are staying at, as well as, the facilities provided can be a cause of discomfort and a concern for safety.
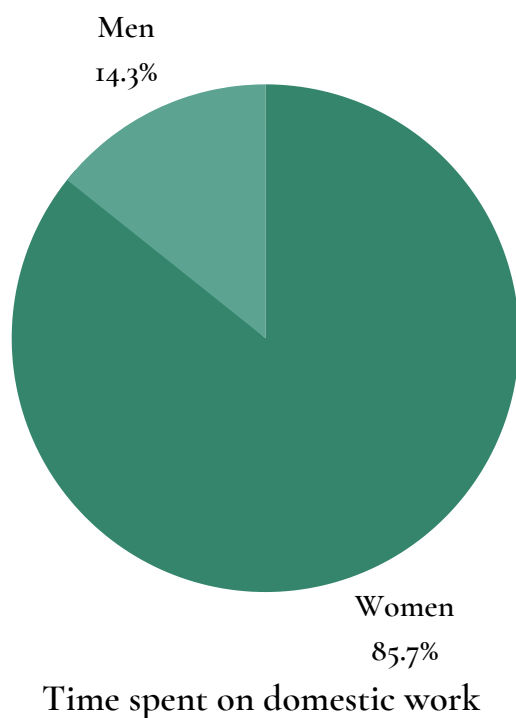
> **Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country.**
> **-Margaret Thatcher**

# PHASE V: MARRIAGE

Women are more likely to quit their jobs mid-career due to the 'double burden syndrome'—a culture where both men and women feel the family and household duties are primarily the woman's responsibility. Due to an increasing number of nuclear families, the responsibilities of the house often fall solely on women post marriage. This is because smaller families signify lesser hands to help at home. More than 64% women said that they do the domestic work at home as there is no one else to do the same, as per a survey by Oxfam India. There is also an additional emotional labour- since in many cultures, women are taught to take care of their families before themselves and the unpaid labour is often taken for granted and goes unnoticed.



Men
14.3%

Women
85.7%

Time spent on domestic work

In 2018, an ILO report found that 606 million women of working age all over the world declared themselves to be unavailable for employment due to unpaid care work, while only 41 million men were inactive for the same reason. According to our survey, 75% respondents believe that home and familial responsibilities are a challenge to the growth and development of women.

Women in India currently spend upto 352 minutes per day (~6 hours) on domestic work, 577 percent more than men (52 minutes) and at least 40 percent more than women in South Africa and China. (26)

Combining paid work commitments with domestic work at home means women are more likely to suffer from 'time poverty', due to which there is little agency to make choices on how to spend one's time, with room for little or no leisure. This fundamentally undermines a woman's human rights. (27)
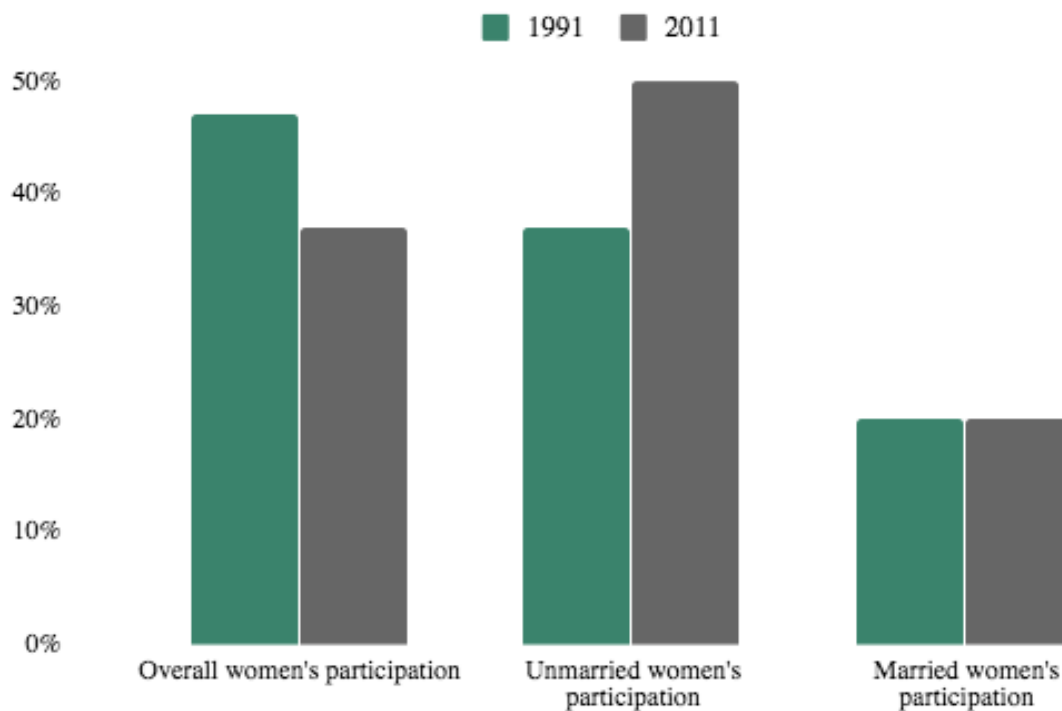
Differences in the workforce participation of married and unmarried women ([28](28))

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the average age at which women are married in rural India is 21 while in urban India it is 23. Hence, it is more likely that women post the age of 23 will start dropping out of the workforce, given the statistics shared above.

Flexible policies: Reports indicate that ~75% of all European employees have access to some work-schedule flexibility, with 90% of employees in the Netherlands and Nordic countries have access to this benefit. As a result, research from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development says that Nordic countries have "high levels of female employment without a large gender gap in average weekly working hours". ([29](29))

According to the data collected by Arthan, 76.2% women believe flexible working hours and policies are important to help them continue working efficiently, while managing both home and work. However, only 49% organisations provide any kind of flexible working options as of now.

**❝**

*I've yet to be on a campus where most women weren't worrying about some aspect of combining marriage, children, and a career. I've yet to find one where many men were worrying about the same thing.*

*- Gloria Steinem*

**❞**

# PHASE VI: MOTHERHOOD

Women are considered primary caregivers of their children. The demands of paid work and child care pushes women to make tradeoffs, especially in the early stages of a child's life. This tradeoff that women have to make in order to take care of their children is called the 'motherhood penalty'- the idea that women have to choose between their family and work in order to bring up their children, unless they receive any formal or informal support for the same.

Working mothers often face criticism for continuing work during early childhood years of their children. Moreover, child rearing responsibilities have increased over time, as nuclear families have become predominant- with women potentially receiving lesser support at home for domestic work. Research indicates that living in a household with older children and women over the age of 50 is positively associated with women's employment. There is also an inherent conflict / guilt that working mothers face, when they need to prioritise work over home and vice versa. Having a young child in the home depresses mothers' employment, an inverse relationship that has intensified over time (30).
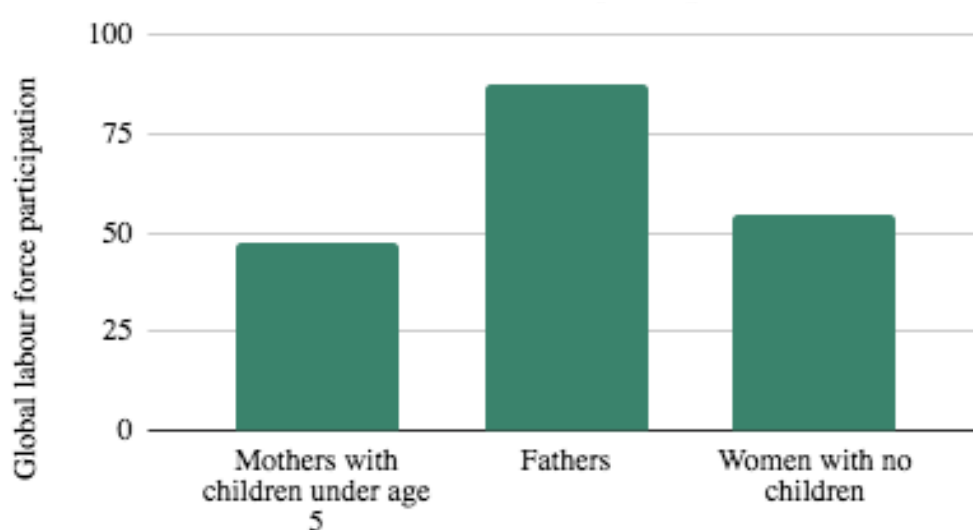


Differences in the workforce participation (31)

These results show that the care of young children is an increasingly important issue in women's employment decisions, in a context where formal childcare is not available. This has significant implications for policy to raise women's labour force participation in India. (32)

Are women more likely to (re)enter the labour force once the children have grown up? For women with graduate and higher levels of education, labour force participation increases from approximately 13% in the early 20s to 28% in the early 30s (33). Childcare is a constraint for married women and continues to remain a roadblock from the employment perspective. Some other reasons for not being able to re-enter the workforce include loss or weakening of professional networks, lack of up-to-date skills, conflicting priorities, a lack of support from family or family restrictions on mobility post motherhood. These are only a few factors that complicate a second entry into the workforce.

According to a FlexJobs survey of more than 2,000 women with children 18 and younger living at home, 31% of women who took a break in their career after having kids wanted to keep working, but reported that their job was too inflexible to remain in the workforce. As per our survey, 20% organisations do not give maternity leave to women (even after it has been mandated by law) and only 64% have put into place a 'back-to-work' program to ensure a comfortable return for women returning after their maternity leave.

**"**

*We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored.*
*- Sheryl Sandberg*

**"**

# PHASE VII: MOVING TO LEADERSHIP ROLES

## A: REPRESENTATION



By mid career, men are 70 percent more likely to be in executive roles than women. By late career, men are 142 percent more likely to be in VP or C-suite roles. On the other hand, women are more likely than men to remain in individual contributor positions over the course of their career (34).

According to a survey conducted by Dasra, the development sector in India is not an outlier to this phenomena. As NGOs become larger, the chances that they will be led by a man double. Women comprise close to 53% of employees across designations in all the not-for-profits that Dasra surveyed, but only 34% of them were in managerial positions. There is a serious lack of representation of women at senior level positions as well in the boards. Of all the senior leaders we interviewed, 57% believe that women are under-represented across all levels, especially the senior leadership level.

# B: NETWORKING

## 80%

Professionals consider networking important for their professional success

## 85%

Positions are filled through networking, wherein face to face communication is important (35)

## 1.5X

More chances of progress into leadership roles if you are a part of the right networks (36)

While the benefits of networking are paramount, many women are unable to access and leverage these with the same ease that men can. Traditionally, networking events happen post work hours, that pose a challenge for women who are unable to travel at late hours due to safety concerns or have to head home to manage familial responsibilities. The manner in which the networking ecosystem has been constructed and run, adversely affects the networking opportunities women can avail.

According to the survey conducted by Arthan, 84% women have reported facing challenges and/or biases while networking. These challenges include: struggle to be taken seriously, lack of women-only platforms, challenges related to safety and harassment. Even within the impact sector, many leaders alluded to the 'boys club' that has traditionally included funders or male NGO leaders. While the sentiment is not that these have been deliberately closed to women, there needs to be a deliberate effort made by men in such relatively closed networks to bring in more women.

At the same time, solely *being* in the same networks as men is not enough for women to have equal access to the same opportunities. There must be a deliberate and genuine effort to include women in conversations and decision making.

While women-only networking platforms offer camaraderie and an open space to discuss challenges, they are not enough. A research by University of Edinburgh concluded that women-only networking platforms can also harm women entrepreneurs as they end up marginalising the women even more.

**66**

*Men- I would like to take this opportunity to extend you a formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too. We don't often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I can see that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence.*
*- Emma Watson*

**99**

# MEN AS ALLIES

While gender inequality, patriarchy and gender biases deeply impact women, men are also affected by the same -mental health challenges, the role of men as parents being less important, toxic masculinity and so on. Men have an important role in achieving gender equality and in promoting women's participation and leadership. Men, as allies, can help in accelerating women's access to employment, providing conducive working conditions, and ensuring full participation in decision-making. The HeForShe campaign by UN Women is an ideal example of achieving solidarity by encouraging all genders to partake as agents of change and take action against negative stereotypes and behaviours.

A BCG report shows that when men are deliberately engaged in gender inclusion programs, 96% of organisations see progress, compared to only 30% of organisations where the men are not engaged (37). Given that men still hold decision-making positions across key sectors, they have a responsibility to play a pivotal role in bringing about change.

As part of earlier conversations on including men in the women empowerment agenda, an ILO issue brief, in 2014, drew upon existing literature to emphasise the importance of engaging men across various levels:

- Within the family/ household level: Engage male household members to challenge gender inequitable norms and practices
- At the community level: Raise awareness through campaigns, participatory sessions, and cultural activities that can help transform harmful norms and stereotypes
- At the policy level: Laws and policies promoting healthy masculinities can act as the backbone to interventions that encourage men to participate in childcare and challenge norms on gendered divisions of labour

# A: MALE LEADERS AND THEIR PERSPECTIVE

In an attempt to gain an understanding of gender nuances from men in the development sector, this report studied the perspective of male leaders and their viewpoints on women's leadership in the development sector.

**1**

**WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

Deval Sanghavi, Partner and Co-Founder at Dasra, believes that organisations need to establish safe spaces that are conducive to promoting an open dialogue on gender related issues. Beyond dialogue, it is the behaviour change communication that can lead to real change and not only policies. He believes that it's not enough for leaders to be 'against gender bias', but one must be 'anti-gender bias'. He says that stereotypes such as, women leaders being more empathetic and male leaders being more assertive, are generalisations, it is about 'leadership traits' and these run across genders.

Arjav Chakravarti, Founder and CEO at Svarya alluded to the fact that stereotypes of women leaders exist. Abled and successful women are often labeled as 'aggressive' which creates additional pressure on women leaders in terms of either avoiding the stereotype or living up to it. Arjav believes that it is important for organisations to prepare their employees from the entry-level to build their capabilities and opinions on leadership rather than waiting until employees reach the level of management.

**2**

**FACTORS THAT PREVENT GROWTH**

Vishal Talreja, Co-founder at Dream a Dream, candidly states that he did not realise he had a gender bias until much later into his leadership. He recognised that patriarchal narratives were deeply ingrained as part of the society he grew up in.

A familiar reason that prevents women colleagues from advancing in their career, for most participants, is most commonly motherhood. Women are increasingly funnelled to fewer numbers in the leadership position as they often find it difficult to reintegrate into the workforce post maternity.

 Jaspreet Gurm, Senior Practice Leader at TechnoServe India, states that the existence of gender asymmetry in terms of opportunity and pay parity is more prevalent in rural India, especially in the agriculture sector where women possess only 14 percent of the land holdings.

# 3

**ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT**

Amol Mishra, Global Commercial Director, CottonConnect, states that inculcating gender inclusive policies not only defines an organisation's culture, but also sets an example to inspire their partners and stakeholders to do the same. The participants agree that flexible and elaborate policies on POSH, maternity benefits and gender sensitivity training (also with implementation partners) are key to create gender inclusive workplaces. In addition, it is equally important to provide gender sensitivity training within the organisation first, before creating policies and implementation programs on gender diversity and inclusion.

# 4

**POLICY REFORMS**

The participants believe it is necessary to create workplaces that provide equal opportunities for men and women, while at the same time provides a safe and conducive environment. This means policy processes should provide an equal weightage to parental leaves, wages and growth opportunities. It is important to not only raise awareness for gender parity but also to understand the reasons behind gender imbalance in the development sector.

Srikanth Viswanathan, Chief Executive Officer at Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, believes that the development sector has an obligation to practice everything it preaches. It needs to therefore lead the way in implementing gender inclusivity first within development sector organisations. This needs to be as part of a broader Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) policy. From his ongoing experience of implementing a D&I policy at his organisation, he believes resources should be channelized by philanthropic organisations to co-create a model D&I policy with specific focus on gender for the development sector as a whole. Individual organisations should be encouraged to sign-up to them and eventually implement it in whole within say a three year period. This should not be a one size fits all policy but taken into account differing context of different NGOs. Srikanth strongly believes that symbolic gestures are insufficient, and we need to move with purpose and speed, philanthropic organisations need to take the lead in the absence of any industry collective.

# B: HOW CAN MEN BE BETTER ALLIES

### LISTEN, LEARN AND UNDERSTAND

The first step is to listen and understand from different women how gender inequality and biases have impacted them. This would require men to be empathetic, and see genuine value in both a woman's experience and her willingness to share the same.

### GET COMFORTABLE BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

While understanding women's challenges, men may come face-to-face with subconscious biases that can make them feel uncomfortable, shameful or guilty. Men need to understand that these conversations are the only way for them to rid themselves of bias and to become more inclusive.

### CHECK YOUR BIAS AND WORK ON IT EVERY DAY
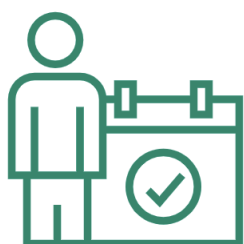
It is not practical to assume that one can rid themselves of their biases within a few days. What is important is to make a vow to challenge yourself and check your actions each and every day. Questions to ask yourself include- Did I interrupt a female colleague in an attempt to explain her thought process? Was there a difference in the way (language, tone) in which I spoke to a male and a female colleague and if yes, is the difference a result of a bias that I hold? What can I do moving forward to change that?

## IT ALL BEGINS AT HOME

We still live in a patriarchal society. In some way or another, we have seen patriarchy play a role in the way our homes function- whether it is the difference in which male and female siblings are treated, or the responsibility (mental and/ or physical) of the household chores falling on the female members. It is important to begin conversations around gender stereotypes/ biases and gender equality at home. A good starting point would be for men to not only share the physical burdens of household chores but also the mental responsibilities.

## ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Both men and women leaders should encourage gender equity. However, as per research, this message resonates more for men when championed by male leaders (38). Men should try to find actionable steps on how to best become an ally for social justice around gender, which might also require them to fight the status quo and challenge and change the ecosystem they have been brought up or worked in.

Many behavioural changes such as understanding recognising and redistributing unpaid work, sharing responsibilities of child rearing and breaking through the gendered stereotypes are changes that we hope men are encouraged to make in their daily lives. These are the changes that will go a long way in supporting women and providing them the opportunity to actively participate in the workforce.

"

*The world is changing. We all know this. And as that world changes, if you do not transform your company, you're stuck.*
*-Ursula Burns*

"

# GENDER INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND POLICIES: SUGGESTIONS

There are a multitude of complex factors that come in the path of a woman's work life, denying her the opportunities as well as the right to have an equitable journey. Many factors- both personal and professional- are at play here. Given the nuanced complexity of these challenges, this study is restricted to highlighting solutions that can be implemented to make the workplace more equal and gender inclusive. Further, while an organisation cannot control for the factors in the personal life of a woman, it can, however, understand the challenges and the biases that women face and make policies that make it easier for them to join and continue being a part of the workforce. While many organisations are making steadfast efforts to understand the challenge and be an active part of the solution, we can and must do better.

It is simply not enough to be gender neutral, the aim must be to become gender inclusive and gender responsive. To be gender responsive we need to acknowledge the struggles and challenges of all genders and undertake action to combat the challenges faced. It means putting in deliberate effort and action to overcome deep rooted gender biases in order for women to truly engage and benefit from these actions, rather than just identifying issues.

We are offering a list of policy and behavioural changes that organisations can implement in order for them to truly take a positive step towards becoming gender inclusive. This list is not exhaustive- with a dynamic ecosystem, challenges will be dynamic and we need solutions to keep up with the pace of these challenges and changes.

# *1* CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT

While offering equal pay and flexible policies are very important, gender disparity is rooted in much deeper and very foundational issues. A gender inclusive workplace would be one where women feel respected and heard. A work culture focused on gender inclusion should value diverse experiences and foster an environment of authentic respect and trust. A culture of support, equity and inclusion is hence, the first and foremost step towards a gender inclusive workplace. Creating a more welcoming and diverse culture is also good for business. An inclusive organisation is two times as likely to exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times more likely to be agile and innovative, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes (39).

To ensure a healthy work culture, the organisational leadership plays a very important role in being actively gender sensitive and gender inclusive as the culture flows from the leadership. There is also a need to hold everyone accountable and to equip employees (through gender sensitisation and awareness workshops) to call out bias and everyday discrimination when they see it so that they become part of the solution. Some of the actionable steps are:

- Buy-in from Leadership - The organisational culture flows from the top, hence leadership needs to set standards demonstrating their commitment to gender equality. This goes a long way in influencing the culture of the organisation. The leadership often sets an example of what is considered acceptable and what is not in an organisation. For example, if the senior management makes casual sexist jokes, even without the intent to harm, it sets a tone in the organisation that it is alright to do so. These are actions that need to be avoided.

- To build a culture of inclusion, it is important to understand the current state of affairs. For the same, it is important to listen- through meetings, group discussions and one-on-one conversations- and understand the challenges that individuals (especially the minority) face. People in the organisation must be prepared to be uncomfortable during these conversations. and post these conversations, take stock of the learning and identify trends/ issues that are emerging and create actionable points to combat the same. For example: if the women in the organisation feel that some meetings run till late which is a cause of concern for them, organisations should take steps to ensure that most important meetings end during office hours or are conducted virtually.

- There are many factors that drive one's subconscious biases. Creating an inclusive team includes bringing together people from different backgrounds who can respect each other and work together, over and above their differences. For this, a diversity and gender sensitisation training is recommended. It is important to use the training sessions to create an open space for discussion and debate, to ensure all voices are heard and respected. It is also important to measure the progress and success of these sessions over time.

- Put thoughts into action to prevent unconscious bias- it is not very practical to assume that years of bias will completely disappear within a few months of trainings and discussions. However, creating policies such as 'no interruptions' during meetings, making pronouns a standard, encouraging the use of gender inclusive language, having gender inclusive facilities at the workplace (restrooms, nursing rooms etc) and having variable pay of managers tied to metrics of gender inclusivity will all act as daily examples of the organisation's commitment to become gender inclusive.

# 2 ENSURE A GENDER INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Establishing a gender inclusive recruitment process is imperative to ensure that all deserving candidates, regardless of their gender, are given a fair and equitable opportunity to apply and go through the recruitment process. A few actionable steps towards that end are mentioned below:

Be cognisant of adjectives used that may be gender biased in the job description and think through the language carefully to make it extremely unbiased. There are many gender decoders available online that can help with the same.

Remove the policy to have the name and picture of any candidate on their CV- not knowing the name reduces the chances of biases that creep in due to gender, religion or caste.

Ensure a gender inclusive hiring team by having equal representation of both men and women throughout the process.

Have quotas for the final round of the interview process, if not for the final job offer i.e. if the final round of the interview is a selection process to pick 1 out of 4 candidates, ensure that there is at least 50% representation of women in that round- this will ensure an equal opportunity to women who might otherwise be on the receiving end of unconscious bias.

# 3 REDUCING GENDERED REWARD AND REVIEW

- The first step to reducing the pay gap is by identifying the disparity in income and the reasons behind the same. One can segment salaries by position, job level, gender and a number of other factors and use this data to identify trends, as well as outlying salaries that are especially low. Make the gender pay gap known by making the salaries for all employees transparent and ensure immediate correction of the same by paying what is fair and due.

- Create a performance evaluation process that is completely based on data and facts. Reduce as much as possible 'open' questions that give the chance to misunderstand or mislead. Equip managers (specially new managers) with the know how on how to give and take constructive feedback and reduce managerial discretion in performance review. Ensure data analysis to remove any unsaid bias from the process.

# 4 NETWORKING, MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING

- Traditional networking events remain inaccessible to some women due to the late hours in which they often take place- carefully considering the time and the venue of networking events can play a very important role in making them inclusive. Further, networks that are a part of a 'boys club' restrict access to women; it is important for men to open up these networks that have been inadvertently closed off to women and take steps to ensure that women have equal access to different networks.

- Mentorship is a key driver in ensuring a reduction in the number of women dropping out of the workforce, due to marriage, motherhood and other factors. Organisations should develop systemic peer-to-peer mentorship programs that can allow each and every professional within that organisation to have the same opportunities to serve as an advisor, mentor, or sponsor, regardless of their position. This will help professionals build relationships with different individuals in the organisation. The process of becoming a part of this program can be made gender neutral so that there is no bias in the process of picking your mentor/ mentee. The program should ensure accountability and the measurement of progress and results.

- Leadership training should be made available to everyone who is progressing in their careers to ensure that they know how to manage and lead teams and emerge as better leaders. Some programs offered to development sector professionals include the Dasra Social Impact Leadership Program, Amani's Leadership for Growth Program, amongst others.

# 5 OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES

We are sharing below an indicative list of policies and processes that organisations can implement to ensure better gender inclusion, this list is not exhaustive. It is important to note policies and processes alone do not lead to change, what is needed a conducive work culture for the fair implementation of the same.

**Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) policy-** It is not enough to have these policies as a part of the code of conduct. Strict and regular implementation, in addition to, creating a culture where people are comfortable to voice concerns is absolutely necessary. Review nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies, and ensure that this information is included in job descriptions, employee handbooks and the organisation's website career page. In addition to having these policies, employees need to be provided with information and resources on who to reach out to in different situations as well as clear steps and processes so that people know what to expect when they file a complaint.

**Create a gender inclusive office space-** From the temperature of the air conditioner to the cafeteria options- the way your office is physically designed can help increase inclusivity.

**Flexible-working and other perks -** Take recommendations from the entire team on the kinds of perks they consider useful and implement the most feasible ones. Policies such as flexible working hours and work from home should be offered to both female and male employees. Menstrual leave can be offered to women employees.

Parental Leave- Organisations should provide all new parents parental leave and encourage them to avail the same. Wherever feasible, organisations should offer the same number of leave days to both genders, as maternity and paternity leave, so as to not reinforce gender roles. This should be offered to all new parents; including those who are using the path of adoption, surrogacy and so on.

Returning to the workforce post maternity - Solutions such as work sharing, creches in office, the option to bring children to work, a 'buddy' system and understanding and empathetic team and management can help ease the transition of new mothers back to the workforce.

Women tend to raise their hands to take up opportunities only when they are absolutely confident of the same. Pushing them to take up opportunities (through mentoring) or having a seat at the table reserved for them (through quotas) is a good place to begin.
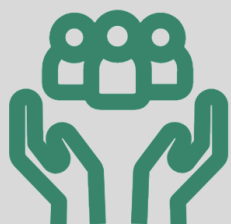
Ensure safety of women by creating a budget for safe hotels while traveling, discouraging travel at odd hours (early in the morning, late at night), having a safe, well connected venue for external events (specially the ones that happen post work hours) and offering post work cab services on the days when work extends beyond normal working hours, go a long way in demonstrating an organisation's commitment to supporting and retaining its women employees.

> **I think that we need women role models everywhere. It is really hard to imagine yourself as something you do not see.**
> **-Chelsea Clinton**

# PART B: CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Understanding the need for women in the development sector to have role models to look up to, and learn from, we interviewed 50 women leaders in the sector and chronicled their journeys to share opportunities, challenges and gender trends they encountered during their leadership journeys, that were instrumental in their development as leaders.

These women leaders cut across NGOs, CSRs, foundations, research institutes, intermediaries, funding organisations, amongst others and are from sectors such as education, water and sanitation, climate change, micro-finance, impact investing, health, gender empowerment and so on.

For the purpose of this study, we have defined a leader as someone who is 1) The head of an organisation, 2) The head of a vertical/program within an organisation or, 3) A member of the board of directors/governing body. The cases studies are presented in alphabetical order.

Aloka Majumdar
Head, Corporate
Sustainability,
HSBC India

Aloka Majumdar is currently the Head of Corporate Sustainability at HSBC, India. She began her journey with HSBC in 2010, and has been a part of the Bank's growth strategy on Sustainability over the last decade. Most recently, she was inducted into the India Executive Committee of the Bank. Prior to this, she worked in corporate citizenship with Citibank, where she was recruited given her acumen as a financial journalist covering banking and finance, the corporate sector and the financial inclusion efforts in India. Her depth of knowledge and information in areas like micro-finance, the working of Indian banks and financial inclusion were enablers in her work as a financial journalist. This also helped her immensely in the development sector work that she embarked upon in 2004.

In her journey of over a decade and a half in the development sector, she has seen women play critical leadership roles. However, when it is comes to the corporate sector, there is an ongoing global debate about the representation of women at the top echelons. While there has been progress on this front in India, there is a lot more that needs to be done. Companies are understanding the need to reorient policies and practices which encourage women to continue their professional journeys seamlessly despite natural breaks like motherhood. What is also necessary is having a culture where open conversations are encouraged and people can voice their concerns bringing in a culture of diversity and inclusion. As far as women are concerned, true diversity is when companies empower women leaders not because it is a good thing to do but because the women they empower are truly capable and are there on merit.

Aloka strongly feels that during the course of her journey at the Bank, her managers and mentors have been instrumental in encouraging and enabling her to feel more empowered. She had a formal, structured mentorship at HSBC. However, informal mentoring has worked equally well for her over time.

In terms of leadership development, she feels that it is important to assess where one stands in an organisation. Is there room to grow? Is there room to learn? It is crucial to assess how one can move up to the next level. As she grew in the organisation, she realised that skills which were important were those of navigating challenges calmly and managing tough issues with maturity and sensitivity. She also believes that taking calculated risks and being a good listener are traits that have helped on her path to leadership.

In terms of skills, she says, hard skills are non-negotiable to grow to a certain level as one must have subject knowledge. But beyond this, there are other key attributes which a potential leader must possess such as people management, the ability to network and manage multiple stakeholders and keeping oneself fully updated about the latest developments in the sector one operates in. It is also essential to widen ones horizons beyond the immediate work-related issues. In a leadership role, one has to interact with people from different walks of life and one must have the ability to have conversations not only about the work one does but beyond that. This helps build strong networks and connections. Habits which have been rewarding for her are reading and keeping herself updated about current affairs.

**Anisha Padukone
CEO,
The Live Love Laugh
Foundation**

In 2014, when her sister was diagnosed with anxiety and depression, Anisha realised that there is a lot more that she needs to learn about the topic of mental health and mental illness. With that in mind, she decided to contribute to The Live Love Laugh Foundation (TLLLF), founded by Deepika Padukone, and subsequently started her journey in the development sector in 2016 by joining the organisation and eventually taking over as its Director in 2017.

Anisha, who was a professional athlete at the time, soon began to realise both the amount of sustained work that needed to be done as well as the impact that could be made especially in a sector as complex as mental health. Anisha believes herself to be extremely fortunate to have strong women leaders to look up to within the organisation for inspiration, guidance and support - from TLLLF's founder, Deepika Padukone to Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, who serves as a trustee on the Foundation's Board. In addition to this, her journey has been greatly influenced by TLLLF's Chairperson, Anna Chandy, who took Anisha under her wing. Having Anna, who is a therapist with over two decades of experience as her mentor, helped her identify her strengths and weaknesses and understand herself as a leader better.

She believes that all organisations should be able to recognise the additional responsibilities that women may have and support them through integrating a culture of diversity, mutual respect and open discussions in the organisation. According to Anisha, the three skills that every good leader should possess are self-awareness of their strengths and scope for improvement; willingness to learn and grow without fearing failure and not being afraid to make tough decisions that are in the best interest of the organisation when needed.

**Anubhuti Patra
In Country
Representative,
Malala Fund**

Anubhuti Patra got introduced to the development sector when she was volunteering as an educator for students coming from low income communities. During that time, there was a constant battle between academia and the development sector in her mind for a career choice. It was after her Masters that she realised how emotionally attached she was to her work and the communities she was supporting and finally, she decided to formally get trained and work in the domain of Development Studies.

She is currently the India Representative at the Malala Fund. As a woman leader, she believes that organisations and work environments should, instead of treating both men and women in the same manner, be gender sensitive - which means that policies and programmes need to take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality. She also believes that, in the Indian context, it is not enough to just have policies in place, but also ensure their effective implementation. For example: it is problematic if an organisation has child care facilities but the culture and the mindset does not encourage women to take advantage of the same. This culture and mindset change flows from the top leadership and hence, the onus to create a gender sensitive work environment lies on them. Taking the same example: if members from the senior leadership team start taking benefit of the child care facilities, it would normalise the same for the entire organisation.

According to her, some other big and small steps that organisations can take to make women feel safer and more comfortable include - checking the venue and time of an external meeting (Is it in a deserted area? Will it end late at night? Are there provisions for travel?); having a good returning mothers program to ensure proper and structured support to women returning to the workplace. According to her, all leaders should be empathetic, consultative and should have the ability to consider different opinions together.

Aparna Hegde
Urogynecologist and
Founder, ARMMAN

It was during Aparna's medical residency that she encountered Rupa. Rupa arrived in labour with convulsions and hypertension. While examining Rupa's records, Aparna was shocked to realise that she had seen Rupa during her third month of pregnancy but she never returned. Aparna felt that she had personally let Rupa down, unable to give her sufficient care and counselling about the need for regular antenatal care due to the overcrowding in the clinic. Meanwhile, Aparna continued to watch women and children dying under unjust circumstances because of pervasive systemic problems, like the lack of information and access to health care. Rupa did not survive, but her story inspired Aparna to establish ARMMAN, with the sole aim of creating cost-effective, scalable and accessible solutions by leveraging technology to ensure that no woman or child dies for want of care. ARMMAN's programs, which use a 'tech plus touch' model to provide weekly critical preventive care information to women for maternal and child care and train health workers, have reached 18 million women and 16 states.

Aparna, a doctor by profession, started ARMMAN in 2008, during her first year at Stanford University. Although Aparna had a clear vision for ARMMAN, the challenge was that she wasn't trained in public health, leadership or had the know-how to start an organisation. She used her skills as an internationally recognised urogynecologist and researcher into building ARMMAN, by learning along the way. ARMMAN was purely a passion project for Aparna, she did not intend to seek recognition or income from it. Aparna's long hours of work, juggling being a doctor in the U.S and setting up ARMMAN in India, coupled with her extreme persistence brought ARMMAN into the limelight after 8 years of establishing it, recently earning the prestigious Skoll Award, 2020.

In Aparna's experience, her leadership journey was a lonely process. She did not have mentors as she wasn't from the public health space and did know where to seek help. Aparna however knew that issues pertaining to maternal and child health care needed to be tackled at a systemic level to make a long lasting impact. Hence, in addition to creating a long-term vision, she solved the problem piece by piece and kept working on it without being discouraged. Along the way, she learned the art of leadership, management and working in public health, and continues to learn. However, in the last five years she has built a great support system through networks and partnerships to receive advice and seek help.

Aparna believes it is harder for women to grow as leaders. They are often not given enough leeway for their downfalls and mistakes. Through her journey, she believes partnerships, networks and mentorship can go a long way in grooming a woman leader. Although she had to figure her path on her own, she is willing to lend a helping hand to those starting off in public health or social entrepreneurship. Aparna advises young leaders to work on their goals with extreme perseverance, assured core vision and building a strong team. In conclusion, Aparna states, "The women we serve have an innate sense of justice and drive to better their lives. Give them a little support and they blossom and are able to upend patriarchal family dynamics and create better circumstances for themselves and their children against all odds."

**Avani Kapur**
**Director,**
**Accountability**
**Initiative and Fellow,**
**Centre for Policy**
**Research**

Avani Kapur is currently the Director at Accountability Initiative & Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). She has 14 years of experience and has been working in the field of governance and social sector financing since 2008. She started her career as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Development and Human Rights with Dr. Arjun Sengupta. During that time, she received an email from Yamini Aiyar who was starting the Accountability Initiative at the time as a part of CPR and was looking for people to join her. Though she felt it was a risky move to join a new initiative, Avani decided to take the leap and wrote to Yamini recommending herself. The journey over the years has been exciting as she has moved up the ladder to currently head Accountability Initiative.

In her career, Avani has seen many women who hesitate in demanding things that they deserve and believes that this was one of the barriers that she also faced. A lot of times, women tend to shy away from voicing their opinions and one of the reasons for the same could be the fact that women prefer to speak up only when they are absolutely confident. She believes that mentoring women could possibly help change that and encourage them to voice their opinions more often and with conviction.

For a lot of women, leadership opportunities come at the cost of family life or work life balance, which is not something that a lot of men have to go through. Something else that is specific to women leaders is having to prove themselves time and again. While organisations can have many policies in place to support women in the best possible manner - policies such as POSH, creating a culture of support, for men to be able to take paternity leaves, flexible timings, being pushed to take on more opportunities - at the end, what is very crucial is to encourage a mindset shift in the general work culture. It is not enough to provide these opportunities to people to balance work and home, but important to also create a safe space where they are not penalised for taking these relaxations or do not miss out on opportunities due to the same. Three qualities that she believes every leader must strive to imbibe are confidence, empathy & inclusiveness, and diligence.

**Chetna Gala Sinha
Founder and
Chairperson,
Mann Deshi Bank and
Mann Deshi
Foundation**

Chetna Sinha came from a middle class family, where her generation was the first in the family to go to college. It was during her college years that many social movements started gaining importance post emergency. This included Gandhian leaders mobilising the youth to work with rural India. Influenced and inspired by the same, very early in life, Chetna got the opportunity to work with political leaders and activists like Sharad Joshi, Pramila Dandavate and JP Narayan. While she did not receive any formal mentoring from them, their courage inspired her greatly. She started actively participating in fighting for women's rights and issues and was even arrested for fighting for land rights for women in Bihar. She considers this experience as one that solidified her, one that increased her courage manifold. Soon after, she got married to Vijay Sinha, who was at the time mobilising women to get wages (since there was no MGNREGA then).

After her marriage, she decided to leave Mumbai and accompanied her husband to live in the rural communities and support the rural poor. While there was a lot of passion for changing and revolutionising the world, she also realised how difficult it was to actually do so. Women in the village would come to her with their problems and when one woman, who wanted to save money, was rejected by the bank, came to Chetna for support, Chetna decided it was time to start a bank for these women. While many people around her thought that it was a crazy idea, she moved ahead with courage and a deep conviction. RBI ended up rejecting the license as the women could not read and write and so, literacy classes began the very next day with 17 women in the village. The women soon challenged the RBI officials to calculate interest without even using a calculator! The RBI granted the license and finally, the first rural bank in India became operational.

While there were many challenges along the way, she found inspiration and courage from the women she worked with. Soon, the bank branched out to giving financial literacy classes, a business school and starting a community radio program and a chamber of commerce for rural women. More than half a million women in India have been impacted by the work that Mann Deshi Foundation does.

There was a time when she felt lonely, being one of the very few women founders. However, as the sector changed over the years and many dynamic young women have now started their own foundations, she feels encouraged. She believes that women should be encouraged to speak up more, ask questions more and it is important to create environments where women feel empowered and confident. The three key skills every leader should have, according to her, are passion, courage and the ability to listen to people.

## Deepmala Mahla
## Regional Director for Asia,
## CARE

Deepmala Mahla serves as CARE's Regional Director for Asia. She began her journey as a development sector professional and then moved on to do humanitarian work. Early on in her career, she moved to Yemen and South Sudan -  highly risky and conflict affected zones, and has worked for two decades designing and implementing humanitarian and development programs in some of the most complex and fragile environments, from the Middle East to Africa and Asia. She has a strong humanitarian voice working actively for the welfare of the most vulnerable communities and protection of aid workers; with distinct expertise in advocacy and communications.

For Deepmala, it's not about being a 'Woman Country Director' but rather a 'Country Director'. She does not believe that gender should define capabilities. As a leader, she believes that one's work has to be stellar and one should be respectful but have the ability to make decisions, which are consultative and transparent. In the initial days of leadership, one needs to put in extra efforts in presentation, and demonstrating abilities. This goes a long way in establishing respect and credibility. Further, leaders should be willing to apologise for mistakes as, while there is no substitute for experience and exposure, but one can work on reducing the time it takes for this exposure and experience. Communication, including nonverbal communication, networking and influencing people are all critical components of leadership.

As a humanitarian worker, one can very easily get frustrated when nothing is working. What kept Deepmala going is the belief that however grim the situation may be, there are always options through which the most vulnerable people can be helped - there is always a way! Her work in South Sudan, where she witnessed many harsh realities of life, redefined the meaning of survival for her.

Being a woman working in high risk areas and as a Country Director, Deepmala often found herself being the only woman at many instances, working in extremely dangerous areas. Deepmala draws her courage from self assurance, her experience and knowledge, and speaking truth to power. She says that being courageous and the willingness to go to uncomfortable places comes naturally to her. Deepmala believes it is important for men to consult the women and take their opinions and expertise into consideration. She asks men to see their female colleagues as colleagues first and be more inclusive, acknowledge mansplaining when it happens and cease it, and not make assumptions about their colleagues based on their gender. Women need to broaden the discourse beyond asking for child care and flexible hours, and be more vocal about their needs for their professional growth and development. Deepmala's job is an integral part of her identity, she has constantly worked to develop herself, learn new things, take risks and stay relevant.

**Gayatri Divecha,
Associate Vice
President & CSR
Head,
Godrej Group**

Gayatri loves to be challenged. When she was 16, instead of spending time relaxing after her board exams, she decided to volunteer with Prerana, a non-profit in Mumbai that works for the welfare of children of sex workers. This experience was her first brush with the development sector and it shocked and inspired her career choices.

Her first break after completing her Masters was working with Dasra, which was then only a six-member start-up. There, she had a mindset shift that looked at people as stakeholders with different needs, and not as oppressed people that needed to be saved. Over the next six years, she worked across multiple areas; research, workshops for NGOs, fundraising, and donor management among other things.

When she left Dasra, Gayatri went on a soul-searching journey to explore how she could make a bigger impact. She discovered that as a people's person, going on a solo journey as an entrepreneur (a thought she had dabbled with) might not be best suited for her. She realised that she needed to be closer to impact. Hence, she joined HSBC's CSR team where she spent two years and most recently moved to Godrej Industries where she heads the CSR function.

Gayatri is vocal about the fact that the development sector refuses to acknowledge its own problems. Simply because it is perceived that the impact sector is doing better than the corporate sector in terms of gender metrics does not mean that the work is done. Like corporates worldwide, junior roles have women diversity, but this ratio falls significantly as one moves to senior leadership.

Further, women's safety - particularly in the field - is an important matter to be looked into as the bulk of the sector's work happens on the ground. She also suggests that the sector needs to start reporting on gender indicators like the ESG report. Older mindsets about hiring young married women, or the belief that being in office 9-5 is the only way to be productive needs to be addressed, challenged and changed.

Gayati shares that the Godrej culture is consciously gender inclusive. POSH policies are strictly codified and proper due diligence is carried out. There are policies around hiring women who have taken breaks, provisions for creche and women's resting area facilities to ease women back to work after pregnancy. People bring in their children to work if they do not have help at home, and colleagues gladly warm-up to the little ones.

She emphasises that leaders of organisations need to create these changes within their organisations. Further, women leaders have to motivate and support others to ensure they can climb the ranks and not perpetuate the discrimination, for biases are prevalent even amongst women. Gayatri is not a big fan of women-only networking. She acknowledges that such platforms are scarce, and it would be useful to have a few of them that focus on women leadership opportunities. Though largely she believes co-ed interactions will help level out stereotypes.

For young people in the sector, what is needed is the will and ability to grow, see different perspectives, identify the changes one needs to make and ask for what one wants. The key is to not shy away from asking. She also states that if something is not working, one should have the strength to accept, leave, learn and come back stronger.

## Hardika Shah
## Founder & CEO,
## Kinara Capital

It was mostly unheard of in the 1980s-India for a middle-class Mumbai family to sell their flat so that their daughter could pursue her undergrad education in the US! But, Hardika Shah was born to a very determined set of parents. Her father was a university professor overcoming many challenges as a blind man, and her mother was a strong-willed woman who followed her entrepreneurial pursuits. Both greatly influenced and inspired Hardika to work hard and be unafraid to take risks in life.

Hardika began her professional arc with Accenture, where she had a flourishing career for two decades, working across the globe. Management Consulting was a great playground for her to solve complex problems that required blending technical skills with expert people management. Her consulting work even brought her back to India to set up Accenture's first delivery centre during the tech boom. Despite India's massive economic transformation, she noticed that small business entrepreneurs continued to face many challenges, the foremost being that there was still lack of access to capital. This stayed with her and she started becoming involved with social entrepreneurship programs by mentoring pro-bono at special programs at Stanford and Santa Clara University.

Small businesses are the real economic drivers and they have the power to transform local communities with income generation and job creation. While pursuing an MBA, in a joint program with Columbia Business School and UC-Berkeley Haas School of Business, Hardika had the opportunity and was determined to address the missing middle gap between commercial and microfinance capital. She built new risk-assessment methodologies and ran a pilot in India. The learnings and success of that pilot became the genesis of Kinara Capital.

Headquartered in Bangalore, Kinara Capital is a socially conscious fin-tech with 110 branches in India. With 1000+ employees across diverse locations, languages, skills, backgrounds, and expectations, leadership means steering them to a common mission of driving financial inclusion of small business entrepreneurs. As a leader, Hardika has built an inclusive and transparent working environment where any employee can and does reach out to others with suggestions, ideas, and even constructive criticism.

Particularly unique to Kinara is Hardika's conscious decision to build a women-majority leadership and management team. Change begins at the top and Hardika wanted to have qualified women get a seat at the table. It would be up to them then to deliver but first, the opportunity must be created. Kinara's 3-out-of-4 CxOs are women and there is gender parity in the management team and nearing gender parity in the headquarters. There is a zero-tolerance on any form of bullying and sexual harassment in the company. Many women have joined the field level jobs that are largely restricted to men in other places.

Hardika Shah's decisions and hard work have paid off! Kinara Capital was the only company from India in 2019 to be recognized by IFC/World Bank with a Gold award as 'Bank of the Year-Asia' for its innovative work in SME Financing. In 2020, Kinara Capital was ranked among 'India's Growth Champions' by the Economic Times and listed among the 'Top High-Growth Companies in Asia-Pacific' by the Financial Times.

Jaskiran Warrik
Director- South Asia,
Organic Cotton
Accelerator

Jaskiran Warrik stumbled upon the development sector by chance and considers herself lucky to have found her calling so serendipitously. Whilst in college studying psychology, she was offered an internship at a development sector consulting firm. She flourished in this diverse, multicultural setup, and was soon leading the same division where she had started out as an intern not so long ago.

It was an exciting first break, with a steep learning curve. Her development was fast tracked as she had a great mentor who pushed her to take opportunities and was supportive of her work. Following that role, she had the opportunity to work with Anita Chester, who was then heading the South Asia operations for CottonConnect. This was her introduction to the sustainable agriculture sector and over the next couple of years, Jaskiran worked with different organisations to get a deeper understanding of the micro and macro challenges in this field. She entirely credits her career success to the female role models who helped her at the start of her career, including, and especially her, career-oriented mother.

Jaskiran has always believed in the power of start-ups to embrace innovative thinking and challenge the status quo. For this reason, in 2017, when the Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA) launched in India, she leapt at the chance to join the initiative. Since starting at OCA three years ago, she has continued to progress in her career and now has the role of OCA's South Asia Director.

According to statistics, women have always had to work harder and longer to get to the same position as men. Hence, Jaskiran strongly believes that women in leading positions are more resilient and often better equipped than their male counterparts at thinking laterally to navigate challenges and get to a win-win for all parties. At OCA, the aim is to make opportunities equitable for all, so team members are encouraged to have an active awareness of their strengths and areas of development and signpost them so the organisation can proactively support them to meet their aims and ambitions at work.

Given the current circumstances, OCA encourages a focus on employees' mental health, demonstrated by regular team discussions and check-ins, led by the management team. Jaskiran constantly strives to nurture a work environment where the team can feel comfortable having difficult conversations and bring up their challenges and struggles. Another policy more unique to OCA is a separate L&D budget for each employee every year, which allows all of the employees equal opportunities to upskill, both personally and professionally.

She believes that we are witnessing a social change in the culture of companies everywhere. Recently, she noticed that leadership is shifting towards a more empathetic and inclusive approach and, as a result, individual employees are more valued within a company. Due to pre-existing gender roles, Jaskiran believes that women are more attuned to this empathy-led management style. As data suggests, women look to strengthening existing relationships and supporting teams more than they focus on self-promotion. In her opinion, the tools that all leaders should have include empathy, resilience, empowering decision-making and above all, an authentic vision.

Jyoti Thyagarajan
Founder Trustee,
Meghshala Trust

Jyoti built her career as a teacher of physics and math, teaching across three continents. As she approached her retirement age as a teacher, she wondered about the impact that she had created and more importantly, what further impact she could create and what she could do to help children at the bottom of the pyramid. And, so Meghshala was born at the end of her teaching career to bring about a change focused on basic education.

Jyoti shared that the 'gender angle' did not figure too much in her life growing up. Born into a middle class, South-Indian and very academically inclined family, Jyoti always did very well in school. When she told her father she wanted to do nuclear physics, there was not even a second of silence. Jyoti was never questioned about this choice at home. She soon joined Physics Honours at the Bangalore University and she was one of only three girls in a hitherto all-boys college. In hindsight, she feels that this should have made it apparent to her that there was a gender malfunction at play all around her. While her other female classmate went on to become nuclear physicists, Jyoti moved into education; a field that was considered "more suited" for women at the time, even though in her head there were no gender specifications in what she was doing.

Regarding the difference in leadership styles, Jyoti feels that women lead in a much more equitable, democratic style. According to her, there is a bank of people who have different tools to facilitate a solution for the different problems that we face. When we bring all these heads together, we bring all the perspectives together in decision making. This gives us a better result.

She feels that one can be blindsided when making decisions alone. When there is collective buy-in from everybody else and something goes wrong, it is in everybody's interest to rescue it. She also likens this to the leadership styles of matriarchs, who managed their families no differently from how organizations are run today.

In terms of the burden on women, she shares the stories of teachers she has worked with, who would come to school tired, having woken up at 4 am, cooked food for everyone in the family, making sure their children are ready for school and then leaving for work. In all of this, these women seldom have time to work on their own development. These factors need to be recognised, especially when we design development programs for women.

She feels that women can benefit greatly from coaching because it is both the professional and personal lives of the person being coached. Women often have multiple dimensions on both fronts that coaching can assist with. Regarding mentorship, she feels that one learns by example. She believes that networking has a wide range. It can be a WhatsApp group for women entrepreneurs, it can be a school's staff room and it can be at a weekend trek. She shares how Meghshala has a very open office - where anybody can bring in their friends, family and how these conversations help generate all sorts of great ideas. This, in Jyoti's opinion, is true networking. It is looking inside and looking beyond networking events. Casual, relaxed meetings lead to deep and meaningful conversations about the edges of our understandings.

A flower-child at 68 years old. Not bad for staying power!

## Jyotsna Jha
### Director,
### Centre for Budget and Policy Studies

Jyotsna Jha is the Director of Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS), Bengaluru. She joined the development sector after completing her PhD in Economics in Education from Jawaharlal Nehru University and started working for a project with the Government of India where she worked for three years. She considers this as an extremely enriching experience that helped her evolve as a leader as only six months into her work, she got the opportunity to lead a unit, work with 15 state governments and a number of international aid agencies. A few seniors in the project ended up mentoring her and have played an instrumental role in helping her grow. Following this, she worked independently for eight years, worked at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London for four years, published a few books and has been heading CBPS for ten years.

Having conducted research on, and specialising in, gender, she shared deeper insights on the need to keep in mind the deep rooted gender divides while making policies for the workplace. For example: work from home helps in giving flexibility to women but then if there is no division of labour at home, thus, reinforcing gender roles by confining them to domesticity. Hence, there is a need to create policies that not only solve the problems in the short term but also change the social norms in the long run. A solution for this could be providing these policies even to the men at work and encouraging them to avail as per their need at home.

She added the need for organisations to be gender responsive and not just gender neutral, i.e., the need for organisations to be aware of the differential needs of different genders and to be responsive to the same, without reinforcing the gender stereotypes. At the same time, there is a need for the leadership to build a gender responsive organisational culture and ethos.

In her career, she has seen many young women not being hired by organisations because of the potential chances of them getting pregnant. These overt discriminatory practices need to be openly discussed and addressed. The need for men to be more supportive to women's causes is important but more importantly, men need to do it with an emphatic and responsible approach by changing themselves, rather than just being sympathetic to the cause. Some key skills that she believes every leader should have include the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes, recognising specific skills and vantage points that different individuals bring in, faster decision making, being fair and having faith in yourself.

**Kalyani Subramanyam**
**Chief Operating Officer,**
**The Naz Foundation (India) Trust**

Kalyani has over two decades of experience in the development sector in issues of HIV, Sexuality and Rights and program design and implementation. Kalyani is also a strong advocate for women's rights and is responsible for the development of the 'Goal Programme' (now called Young People's Initiative) at Naz, that transformed the lives of 1,20,000 disadvantaged adolescent girls and young women. In 2017, she was honoured with the Life Time Achievement Award at the Global Goal Summit, for her commitment to providing safe spaces for girls to play and providing them with life skills education. Kalyani has also been appointed as a member at the International Safeguarding Children in Sport Advisory Board at UNICEF.

Kalyani considers herself as one of the blessed few who knew early on in her life what she wanted to do. As a teenager, Kalyani was able to identify her ability and affinity to help people in distress. She chose her path in education and career keeping in mind her interest in people and her commitment to influence behaviour change. She went on to pursue a Master's in Social Work and a Post-graduate Diploma in Personnel Management. At the age of 22, Kalyani began her career at Society of Friends of Sassoon Hospitals where she began to showcase her leadership qualities. In Kalyani's opinion, a leader is someone who makes a commitment and sees through it.

Kalyani believes that men and women have equal opportunities but the inequalities lie at the social and community level. Kalyani says that it's important to understand leadership through a gender lens - to examine why women's path to leadership may be different, the reasons women cannot participate at various levels and what an organisation can do about it. As a working professional, Kalyani has moved 7 cities in the last 20 years, because of her husband's transferable job. But in her 17 years at Naz, Kalyani was able to reintegrate back to the organisation within 6 months of having her second child, bring her child to work and set up offices in Mumbai and Bangalore, because she had the right support from her organisation.

Kalyani's experience being a Vital Voices Lead Fellow and an alumnus of the Dasra Leadership Program made her realise that, having structured inputs along with mentors who can course correct one's professional journey, can help build the path to leadership. And, becoming a leader is not only about making decisions but having the right resources and opportunities available to make an informed decision. Kalyani's advice to budding leaders would be to, one: be relevant and resilient to the changing times, two: forge partnerships with men and women allies and, three: to dream and to dare.

Katie Pyle
Head - Research &
Insights,
Janaagraha Centre for
Citizenship and
Democracy

Katie is currently Head of Research & Insights at Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy as well as a part of the Executive Committee. After studying psychology in the UK, she worked in educational research and assessments before moving to research operations. A key turning point for her during her early career was when she was on a secondment to a different department and the head of that department identified her potential and asked her to stay on, which she did. She attributes much of her early career growth to having this female senior as well as her manager at the time. Both women were great mentors, role models, and encouraged her to reach her potential. They never shied away from giving candid feedback, but this was always constructive and with the intention of helping her grow in a positive way. During this time in her career, Katie managed and expanded a project called 'Teacher Voice,' which aimed to bring up-to-the-minute views of teachers on topical issues. It encouraged her to think about her own voice and reflect on what she wanted for her career.

In 2014, Katie moved to India after marrying her Indian husband and joined Janaagraha as a Manager in the Research & Insights team. It was a great opportunity for her to grow, in the still quite niche area of urban research in India. Adjusting to a new culture and work-place, however, came hand-in-hand with becoming pregnant within six months of joining Janaagraha. It was a collective learning experience for both her and Janaagraha in understanding how she could embrace motherhood, manage childcare, continue to fulfil her potential and grow in her career. Katie believes having the opportunity to speak candidly about your challenges as a woman is imperative in being able to create allies and enablers to women in the workplace.

Open dialogue and open minds from both sides lay the foundation of Katie's ability to continue working at Janaagraha after her maternity leave in a way that maintained her significant presence and growth pattern in the organisation. Katie has been able to work flexibly with her timings and presence in the office as well as with limited travel as part of her role. Nonetheless, she has continued growing in her career and was promoted to Head of the Research & Insights department and Executive Committee member in 2018.

Janaagraha has also, over the last few years, begun a strand of thinking around Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), with a particular focus on women, which Katie is spearheading. They have implemented a D&I policy and, amongst other things, undertaken a review of all their policies from a D&I angle to work towards creating an enabling environment for all. Katie is very aware of early privileges in her education, having support from her family and those in the organisations where she has worked, that have allowed her to progress her career in a relatively smooth way. This is something she believes she and other leaders' (regardless of gender) have an obligation to extend to all women by facilitating systemic and structural change in their organisations.

Katie believes that leaders need to embrace diversity and inclusion and be advocates and enablers of their teams. Other qualities which Katie believes a leader in the development sector should have are, being eclectic, empathetic, and dynamic, having a sense of humour and being well read and cognisant of current affairs. She believes it is important not to rush into leadership or wish away the intermediate steps in ones career. These are important points at which to pause, reflect, look around and notice what works well, what doesn't work well, what you like and don't like. She believes these are milestones that help you grow and become more successful in your career in the long-run.

**Kinkini Roychoudhary**
**Asia Lead,**
**Accenture**
**Development**
**Partnerships**

Kinkini heads the Asia region for the Social Impact Practice at Accenture. She joined Accenture post her MBA and worked across several verticals - M&A, oil and gas industry - in India and the US. In 2015, before going on her maternity leave, she got the opportunity to lead Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP) at Accenture and continued in the role post her maternity leave. Under her leadership, the practice has expanded to seven different markets in a short span of time. Her work in, and learnings from, the corporate sector have been helpful in the work she has done in the development sector.

Accenture is consciously taking many steps to ensure that they become gender neutral by 2025. Some initiatives include promoting gender neutrality across all leadership levels, ensuring diversity in the supply chain and procurement, having a returning mothers program, having a virtual summer camp for children during the pandemic, creating an ecosystem where women support women and ensuring metrics are set and continuously monitored such as tracking gender parity across levels.

Kinkini has come across many women in her career who often judge themselves more, are shy of speaking their mind and feel less confident as opposed to men. She feels that we need to support such women and explain that they must not hesitate to speak up and that there are no wrong questions. Meanwhile, patriarchy as a whole needs to be addressed - if a man wants to leave his job and take care of his children, why is there so much stigma? It is not enough to give women/men equal opportunities; we all need to break away from the gender stereotypes and conditioning. At home, respect and support for the careers of women is important and at work, women need to be vocal about their constraints.

Kinkini is also a true believer of mentorship. From storyboarding, to client presentations - her mentors (who have been both men and women) have taught her a lot. Regarding networking, Kinkini feels that good networking can establish you as an influencer, enable better business development by knowing the right partners as well as promote empathy (the feeling of being able to relate with, and have agency, around many people).

Kinkini does believe that women are better multi-taskers and have a more human centered design to problem solving. In a sector where the benefit of the target group should be the heart of any model, mastering this skill is very important and hence, more women should be encouraged to rise through the ranks and lead programs. According to her, all leaders should allow their teams to be flexible, to allow them to re-skill and grow, and should know how to give dynamic feedback.

Madhu Krishna
Deputy Director,
Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation

Before finding her true calling in global development, Madhu Krishna had already worn several hats. She started her career teaching history to undergraduate students, moved into journalism, where she was instrumental in launching India's first telecommunications magazine, and then joined a boutique consulting firm. While the consulting firm supported mainstream industrial clients (Tata Steel, Indian Oil etc), it also provided pro bono services to NGOs and this became Madhu's introduction to development. 25 years on, she remains as passionately committed to the sector.

Even in the world of development, Madhu's interests and contributions have been eclectic, yet deeply impactful. Madhu worked with PATH, a leading health NGO, where in her first two years, she helped expand the organisation's portfolio of work and donors in India, growing the team from 5 to over 25, enhancing the annual budget of over $40 million and becoming one of the government's premier public health partners. She also helped introduce the Hepatitis B vaccine in the government's immunisation programme, and the use of auto-disable syringes in the national programme.

Yet, her journey has not always been smooth. At work she was often called bossy and aggressive, even as her male counterparts would be termed entrepreneurial and authoritative for the same. Balancing hectic work and family, Madhu eventually decided to become a full-time independent consultant so that she could spend time with her teenage son. Coming from a gender-balanced home, she and her husband took this decision collectively (much to the chagrin of her husband, who was rather looking forward to painting full-time instead). Meanwhile, she continued to support several NGO initiatives in public health, land rights, water & sanitation, and ICT for development.

Having worked closely with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) since she was roped into support during their initial entry in India in 2002, Madhu joined BMGF when she decided to return to full-time work –as the India lead for BMGF's Water Sanitation (WSH) program. Over the past 5 years, Madhu, her team and partners, have supported the government in bringing transformative change to urban sanitation, moving from a narrower focus on open defecation-free urban areas to sanitation across the value chain, with initiaives such as bringing more attention to the neglected small and medium cities.

Madhu also supports her passion – gender equality – at BMGF. She believes it is important to bring forth the inherent gender inequities in any sector and over time, most stakeholders start paying the necessary attention, especially if the evidence presented is so stark that no one is able to walk away from it. What is required is a constant drum beat from both women and men in a coherent articulation, with a solutions-based approach that policy makers can embrace. Madhu believes that women leaders play a pivotal role in helping other women realise their potential as leaders, especially in the early stages of their career. Yet, the burden of responsibility also lies on male leaders.

Madhu feels that women and men tend to appreciate and hire for different skill sets; women appreciate softer skills such as empathy, stakeholder engagement, while men assess largely on technical skills and even assess women based on these traits. Hence, it is essential to have mixed gender hiring panels and selection criteria that balance both types of skills. While she has seen considerable progress over the course of her career in the fight for gender equality, Madhu stresses that we have a long, long way to go. The pandemic has only intensified this; undue burden of work, often unpaid, continues to fall on women. Organisations need to make internal changes in hiring processes, reducing gender biases in both their own operations and how they design program interventions. We should carefully look at the outcomes on gender equality through a variety of gender-informed design for reservations, quotas, financial products and inclusion, to technology products, workspaces, public spaces and business environments that would give women the elusive level playing field in all parts of their lives – work, community and home.

**Mary Ellen Matsui**
CEO,
Atma

Mary Ellen Matsui came to India in 2007 as an intern with AIESEC. Originally from Canada, her experience in India was an eye opener and she decided to stay back to work for the development causes here. She joined Atma at the beginning of their journey as a Resource Manager in 2008 and took over as the CEO in 2011. She has spearheaded Atma's scale-up strategy, including its geographic expansion and has grown the team as well as the Atma Network, a resource sharing and collaboration platform. She has also personally driven Atma's strategic focus towards developing an inclusive education agenda through Gati and has personally consulted over 30 non profit organizations.

Atma believes in value alignment of individuals and organizations. While selecting the board, Mary Ellen talked about the importance of having one that is evenly split with respect to gender - to have diversity in the voices and opinions of the board, whose main work is to support and guide the leadership of any organisation. As a leader, she feels that the sector needs to understand the biases that women face and figure out ways to minimise the same. She has seen how people generally end up having more faith in male leaders and men are given more opportunities. However, checking data and facts, a lot of organisations that have been there for a long time are women-led. Further, one needs to look at biases as a whole - directed at both men and women - if we want to make the sector more inclusive.

Internally for Atma, she believes in having consciously diverse hiring practices - from the people who are being interviewed to the people interviewing. She strongly believes that an organization needs to invest in the mental health of its employees. Since many organisations struggle to have a budget for something along these lines, they can encourage good mental health practices by having a good mental health and leave (liberal) policy, creating an open and communicative culture and doing sessions and sharing resources as a team.

She has invested in her personal development as a leader over the years. This includes support from mentors, coaches, therapists, informal and formal networks and so on, for greater holistic development. Mary Ellen has seen the importance and benefits of networking over the years. She feels that networking is something that comes naturally to her and as per her experience, encourages any network to invest in building relationships and trust between individuals.

**Meenakshi Batra
CEO,
Charities Aid
Foundation India**

A widely recognised international development professional, Meenakshi has many feathers in her cap. With over three decades of multifarious experience globally, she has driven organisations across the globe to catalyse change and make a positive impact on the lives of the underprivileged and marginalised sections of societies across South and South East Asia. Meenakshi's work in the development sector encompasses a wide range of aspects - from providing strategic leadership, to strengthening organisations, facilitating sustainability through corporate social responsibility and philanthropy. Through effective campaigns, programme management and networking, she has led organisations with immense clarity of thought.

Currently Meenakshi is the CEO of Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) India – an organisation with the mission to promote giving in India. Meenakshi's leadership has put CAF India on an impressive growth trajectory. Upon her joining in 2012, the organisation has grown almost by 600 percent. Meenakshi initiated an organisation development process - setting the vision, shaping the organisation and driving it for growth and impact. This has positioned CAF India as a leading agency offering philanthropic and CSR management services to hundreds of donors and not-for-profits, year after year.

Working in established organisations for the most part of her career, Meenakshi feels that the people in established organisations have better opportunities for growth as leaders since they have an enabling architecture that allows people to learn and grow. Meenakshi feels that her leadership abilities were appreciated in the organisations that had an appetite for growth and risk taking.

Through her work, Meenakshi has emerged as a thought leader in the field of philanthropy and development. Her work has been recognised and acknowledged through several prestigious awards, such as the Indian Women Achiever Award (IWAA), NGO Women Leadership Award, Women in Leadership Award and many more. She also speaks frequently at various national and international conferences and writes frequently for media and other channels.

As a believer of gender neutrality, Meenakshi feels that there is a lack of women in the leadership in the development sector, as well as, dearth of opportunities created for promoting women's leadership. Meenakshi believes that the sky is closer than we think and what is needed is to have the vision early on of where one wants to be and to be persistent in that journey.

## Naghma Mulla
## Chief Operating Officer,
## EdelGive Foundation

A chartered accountant by profession, Naghma had a successful career in the corporate sector when she decided to make the switch to the development sector. She had multiple conversations with Vidya Shah, Founder of EdelGive Foundation, before she decided to take the plunge. At the time, Naghma decided to join with a spirit to learn and experiment, and based on the experience, would decide her longer course of action. Many people questioned her move, citing it must be because she was burnt out in the corporate world or was looking for an easier part-time opportunity, but none of this deterred Naghma, who took all of this in her stride and with a sense of humour.

Naghma took her time to read, learn and understand the sector in depth. The stories of challenges and solutions all inspired her and seemed to open a new world of sorts. Naghma did question that if the sector already had great people in it, how could she contribute, as someone completely new to the same? She started by providing her expert guidance on finance, budgeting and as time went by, she realised that her core strengths are people and her ability to tell stories, a skill she would leverage in the development sector, to move multiple stakeholders with stories from the ground and make them aware of issues.

Naghma feels that both formal and informal mentorship is important, and she has had the opportunity to receive both. She feels blessed that whenever she had questions, people gave her time, something she tries to pass forward. She feels her network has been a great strength for her and supported her throughout her journey. She is at ease, at large networking forums with multiple people, as well as, with her closer one-on-one relationships and connections within the sector. She feels that women-only networks may not be the sole answer as one also needs to influence thoughts of men and enable inclusivity within the sector. Therefore, she believes mixed networking is the need of the hour.

Naghma shares that EdelGive has been very open to accommodating various requests for flexibility that she or her colleagues have needed over the years. Intent to do good and dedication were the only requirements that were considered, and this has become an inherent organisational behaviour. Colleagues would incorporate a lot of flexibility to accommodate other people's needs and this has gone a long way of creating a culture of loyalty.

As a leader, Naghma believes openness in approach is extremely important. Leaders need to give more attention to the purpose rather than biases. She also encourages leaders to focus on building robust institutions that are committed to discipline and collaboration.

For a leader, Naghma feels, the qualities needed include openness in approach, where purpose is given more attention than biases, for leaders to be open minded about who they work with, and leaders who work on building robust institutions that focus on discipline and collaboration. While the sector has a lot of women, most are not CEOs, many reach the second line of management - but very few women reach the top of the institution and she wishes that this soon changes and that the sector sees more women leaders.

## Nalini Gangadharan
## Chairperson, CAP Foundation

Nalini is a development professional with ~30 years of experience under her belt, including many innovative and path–breaking initiatives such as Dr. Reddy's Foundation for Human and Social Development, Hyderabad Programs of India, the Child Relief and You (CRY) Fellowship Program and Clothes Bank- for recycling used clothes and most recently, CAP Foundation. At CAP Foundation, Nalini inspires a dedicated team of professionals and business mentors in India and sub-Saharan Africa to provide end-to-end livelihood solutions that link learning and livelihoods for marginalised and at-risk groups of young people.

Nalini's first experience of working for the under-privileged came early in high school when she helped organise a flood relief camp after a cyclone attack in Chennai. That experience deeply motivated her to work in the development sector. Nalini began working at the Guild of Service as an Assistant Director, where she challenged herself and the organisation, running many successful programs. Thereafter, she worked as a resident at Ashoka- Innovators for the Public, for close to a decade before becoming a freelance consultant. In 1996, Nalini independently set up a separate institution Dr. Reddy's Foundation, Hyderabad  for Dr. Anji Reddy, Philanthropist and successful pharma businessman.

In 2003, she founded CAP Foundation for rescue and rehabilitation of youth at risk. Presently, Nalini feels that having prepared her colleagues, she is ready to step away from her current leadership roles. Nalini says, there is always a feeling of joy and ecstasy to groom and see what you have created in your organisation. At the same time, it is important to recognise the next generation leaders within your organisation, and allow for that local leadership to gradually take over, while ensuring the DNA of the organisation remains. Nalini stated that it is never easy to find the right people for your organisation, it is a result of trying, testing and learning from failures.

In Nalini's experience, a women's leadership journey could be very lonely at the top .There are no conscious programs that can help women let down their armor and compare their leadership with other women. Informal and formal networking opportunities for women can be beneficial in the long run. Another important aspect that Nalini recommends is mentoring support, as a certified coach, Nalini emphasised that mentoring can teach a leader humility to draw from and rise above yourself.

**Nandita Banerjee
Head HR & Capacity
Building,
ASER Centre**

Nandita Banerjee had worked in the development sector for close to 6 years before having to leave work to move to Singapore with her husband. She was out of the labour force for close to 5 years before she decided to begin working again. Those five years gave her a good chance to introspect and understand that creating value by working is absolutely critical for her. As she started interviewing, she found it difficult to justify the gap many organisations tried to probe about. ASER was the only interview she gave that focused completely on her experience and skills and not her personal life and hence, she joined ASER in 2011. Returning to the workforce was not easy for her - there were times when she struggled to even send an email- and her confidence was very low. After years of growth and struggle, today, she is the head of Human Resources (HR) and Capacity Building at ASER.

As an HR representative, Nandita and her team have ensured that ASER follows all the policies mandated by law to ensure diversity and inclusion. Along with that, in order to keep many women as a part of the workforce, they have gone above and beyond to support them. Example: a colleague was about to quit the organisation after giving birth to her baby but the team did everything possible to get her to stay on board - from options like work from home, to reducing workload, including her in workshops, sending her invitations, or just talking to her - and today, five years later, she is still a part of ASER. Similarly, the organisation has supported many women facing different circumstances, from not being able to travel to being differently abled - and ensured that they do not leave the organisation or the workforce due to challenges that can be dealt with.

Nandita believes that because most men grow with a position of privilege and do not understand women's challenges or perspectives, it becomes important for them to teach themselves and to get rid of their inherent biases. An organisation can support this journey by holding gender sensitivity trainings, especially for teams on the ground. A lot of trainings, according to her, end up happening informally and in day-to-day conversations and so, leaders need to have difficult conversations and not shy away from them to ensure gender sensitivity and gender inclusiveness.

Nandita Baruah
Country
Representative,
The Asia Foundation
India

Nandita has over 26 years of professional experience working on gender, human rights, labor migration and human trafficking issues in South and Southeast Asia. Nandita began working with grassroots organisations that were women-led in the early 90s, at a time where the concept of feminism was nascent. Her work in women empowerment provided her a steep learning curve for the issues around disempowerment that existed for women in patriarchal societies. Her work in legal rights through gender justice programs increased her interest in promoting women's rights that were lacking in the judiciaries. In addition to her extensive experience in the development sector, Nandita has also worked with public sector and private sector companies.

The support from women peers was a critical backbone in Nandita's leadership journey, although the learning at times came at the cost of being judged for her actions by her colleagues, both men and women. This affected many aspects of Nandita's professional life. Nandita iterates that it is important to be an inclusive leader, although you have the authority to take the final call and stand your ground - as a leader you need to consult your peers and allow for constructive criticism. At the same time, it is important to give your employees a sense of work-life balance.

In Nandita's opinion, not enough women are in leadership roles because of the existing structures in the social sector. Nandita believes the existing system needs to be systematically broken down through training programs, with special emphasis on negotiation skills and women networks to share and discuss common experiences. This is specifically relevant for women entering the workforce through the gig economy. While it is great for them from an economic standpoint, it still needs structures to ensure safety and better working conditions as they run the risk of workplace harassment in many instances, and need specific protection mechanisms. As a gender expert, Nandita does believe that the sector has come a long way to accommodate more women leaders. However, present realities need to be kept in context at every step.

## Neelam Makhijani
## Country Director, ChildFund India

Not one to walk the regular path, Neelam Makhijani epitomises a rebel with a cause. Leaving the comfort of her home behind, Neelam moved to the US in her early 20's with the desire to do something different. She started as a journalist in New York and worked for a leading Asian weekly, where she wrote and commented on South Asian political issues. After a few years with a flourishing career in New York, Neelam decided to give it all up and move back to India, to be close to her family and also contribute to the development sector in India. Neelam moved back to Delhi and joined HelpAge India to manage their international fundraising and communications. Within a very short time Neelam was promoted to Director and transferred to HelpAge HQ in the UK. In the UK, Neelam pursued an MBA from London University, and an Excellence in Leadership course from Harvard University and worked with various global organisations.

Everywhere that Neelam went, she rose in the hierarchy fast due to her grit and her ability to take risks. Neelam feels that many a times, she had to put in more effort than her male colleagues given the biases that exist in all sectors, whether it is journalism, fund raising or the development sector. Gender bias in the workplace is not unique to India and exists across big and small organisations, across the world, as experienced by Neelam.

Neelam joined ChildFund India as Country Director and CEO six years back and has been able to revitalise ChildFund India's core operations and program impact by strengthening the organisation's ability to fulfill its mandate towards children throughout India.

Fearless and determined, Neelam believes that for women to succeed as leaders, they have to take risks and give it their best and not be disillusioned with failures since success always follows.

**Neera Nundy
Co-Founder,
Dasra**

Neera grew up in a family with strong working women as role models; her mother had studied engineering from IIT Kharagpur and her grandmother was a psychiatrist. Having such strong women role models, who worked in science and math, inspired and encouraged Neera and her sister to break the gender stereotype by choosing to be in what would traditionally be known as 'male-dominated areas'. She chose to study math and actuarial sciences, did an MBA from Harvard Business School and worked in investment banking and M&A.

As she was completing her MBA, Deval (Dasra's co-founder and Neera's husband) was working on the idea of starting Dasra. Neera continued in investment banking for a few years, to manage her student loans, post which she joined Deval as a co-founder at Dasra to build the capacity of NGOs in India and work on the massive issue of poverty. She wanted to leverage her privilege of education to benefit the development sector in India.

While the transition felt natural, it was not all smooth sailing. There were many challenges to manage, especially because the organisation was growing at the same time as her family and in some ways, her professional and personal life were woven together as the CEO was her spouse. However, she highlights her ability to build Dasra and pursue a fulfilling career has been enabled by the healthy partnership with her husband, Deval Sanghavi. She encourages women to recognize that choosing a spouse or partner that is not only supportive of your career aspirations but willing to share the family-caring responsibilities will help strengthen women's leadership in India.

From the start, Dasra was clear about giving better representation to women and this was reflected early on in wanting to have majority women leaders in their Dasra Social Impact Leadership Program.

According to Neera, there is a need to give women a 'jumpstart of sorts', as there is no level playing field. This is because men do get competitive advantages that women do not in their career trajectories. There are many women who make the junior and middle level management but not many who are a part of the senior level management. This is because many women drop out of the workforce during their mid 30s and early 40s, as they need to manage their families, something they are unable to do with growing work priorities as they do not get the conducive support from their organisations. To combat the same, it becomes important to consciously and intentionally invest in the people in the organisation.

Additional to this, it is very important to support women through their pregnancies because it is mainly around that time that women decide to leave the workforce. Some ways of offering support include providing flexibility to men and women with maternity and paternity leaves, having child care facilities at work, staying involved and in touch with the employees and giving them the opportunity to tap out and take a break wherever needed. Beyond this, it is important to give them confidence and make them feel valued and illustrate that they and their work is important to the organisation. Neera feels that skills that all leaders must have are self awareness, self confidence, empathy and a spirit of collaboration.

Pratima Joshi
Founding Member and
Executive Director,
Shelter Associates

Pratima, an architect and an expert in Building Design for Developing Countries, launched her career at the Center for Development Studies and Activities, Pune where she met her co-founders, who shared similar passion and vision. Pratima translated her knowledge as an architect and her passion to support equitable distribution of rights and resources for the urban poor, which led to the establishment of Shelter Associates (SA) in 1993. With no prior expertise in the social sector, Pratima and her fellow co-founders realised that they have to mould themselves around the learning process and make the best out of it.

Since the inception of Shelter Associates, there has been a conscious effort to involve more women not only at the organisation but also in the communities they worked with, especially because SA's work in areas such as water and sanitation directly impacts women. Their involvement has empowered women to voice their opinions and represent the communities. Although women are a moving force in the organisation, SA has been able to leverage gender not only through skill sets but through the intrinsic traits of men and women in the most conducive manner. Pratima emphasises the greatest challenge while setting up SA was that there weren't too many organisations they could compare their work with. Opportunities like the Dasra Leadership Programme and networking groups like Include helped Pratima connect with peers, a network that still offers help and support to reflect, soundboard ideas and share similar experiences.

In terms of mentoring, Pratima follows a system of being a sounding board for the young professionals who work or volunteer at SA, keeping an open door policy where they can come and discuss their ideas and challenges with Pratima. Pratima encourages more organisations and upcoming architects to work in the low cost housing and services sector. Pratima hopes for the ecosystem to enable more startups in improving living conditions of the urban poor, an area that Shelter Associates would love to mentor and help those who want to start similar journeys.

## Prema Gopalan
## Founder and Executive Director,
## Swayam Shikshan Prayog

Prema began her journey as a social entrepreneur with an ambitious goal to transform women's lives in poor communities. She instituted a network that would allow grassroots women's organisations to overcome social and economic challenges. The idea soon transformed to create a learning platform, which then became Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), a Self Education network for Empowerment. In over two decades, Prema has built a robust partnership of ecosystems of for-profit Social Enterprises, Sakhi Federations and Farmer Producer Companies that has enabled over 2,00,000 rural women entrepreneurs to start businesses in high social-impact sectors, impacting 55,00,000 households.

SSP was formally launched in 1998, and had begun as a response to the Latur earthquake in 1993. It was designed as a mass scale partnership with the Government to reshape an individual beneficiary program into a community-driven reconstruction effort. In the aftermath of the earthquake, Prema re-directed her leadership from her previous experience of mobilising the urban poor to lead rebuilding homes in rural communities. Her leadership in a mass scale disaster effort is attributed to her risk taking ability spurred by a belief system that resonated with her members, who continue to be co-travellers till today.

In Prema's opinion, the critical aspect that stands out when working with grassroots women entrepreneurs and community leaders is that women take decisions not only for immediate economic returns but invest in decisions that result in a sustainable future. While SSP emerged as a response to various natural disasters, Prema believes that the experience has moulded SSP to be relevant, while building a culture of collective decision making within the organisation and in the communities they work with. As a veteran in the sector, although Prema has had the good fortune of having a network that has influenced her leadership and provided peer support, she strongly believes there needs to be more forums for women leaders to exchange their learning and experiences. The leadership journey is empowering, however it could be a lonely process for some, especially women, if they cannot resonate their learning experience with leaders whom they can relate their professional journeys with.

## Priya Agrawal
## Founder & Director,
## Antarang Foundation

Priya is the founder of Antarang Foundation, an organisation that systematically addresses the gap between education and productive employment for high-risk youth. Antarang has impacted the careers and futures of over 82,000 adolescents and young adults. Prior to founding Antarang in 2012, Priya spent 20 years in the corporate sector in advertising and also led large organisations in India's social sector including The Akanksha Foundation and SNEHA. Priya is an Ashoka Fellow, UnLtd India Growth Challenge Fellow and alumni of the Dasra Social Impact Leadership Program. It was an instinctive decision to understand and contribute to the social realities that made Priya move to the social sector in 2001. While at SNEHA, Priya worked part-time with adolescent groups, where she was drawn toward the idea that the transition between school and work is often difficult, especially for first generation learners. As the part-time work with adolescent groups increased, Priya decided to take the plunge and started Antarang Foundation in 2012.

Priya believes that there is a great support system for women leaders at the ecosystem level, provided they have the ability to access the networks available to them. However, she also believes there is a gendered lens when it comes to formal leadership programs. One of the major shortfalls Priya identifies is the age barrier women face. In Priya's opinion, women-focused development initiatives expect a younger leadership cohort. She believes it may be counter intuitive, as older women have the experience and lesser familial responsibilities, and hence may greatly benefit from such programs. Another aspect is that leaders from urban India seem to have a larger access to resources, for example, leaders who are not well versed with English, have limited content and material out there to better equip themselves.

In terms of the development sector being more gender inclusive, Priya alludes to making leadership development opportunities more inclusive to women across age, location and education qualifications. And to make sure there is representation across the gender spectrum in the sector, there is a need to ensure that men see why they are needed in this conversation. Priya's advice to young women leaders is to have clarity of vision, empathy and belief in people and to own the ability to speak for themselves.

**Priyaka Dhingra
Advisor,
Vision Entrepreneur's
Livelihood Bond, Essilor
International (Singapore)
& Philanthropy
Consultant,
A.T.E. Chandra
Foundation**

Priyaka Nagpal Dhingra transitioned to the development sector after working in Banking with BNP Paribas in India and Hong Kong for close to 7 years. She got an opportunity to volunteer with GiveIndia in 2013 and discovered her true calling in the impact space leading to her decision to formally join GiveIndia in the Family Giving philanthropy team. One of the first relationships she managed was the Chandra family, who are Forbes Asia Heroes of Philanthropy. Over time the portfolio grew to be one of the largest in India and she went on to set-up the family foundation in 2017 as the first employee. It was a very intensive engagement with deep immersion in the social sector, involving working & learning alongside visionary leaders such as Archana and Amit Chandra. The skills she had honed during her banking innings were seamlessly leveraged in the social impact space, be it in project diligence or relationship management across stakeholders.

Post helping manage their philanthropic portfolio over a large part of the last decade, she got the opportunity to be a part of the drafting committee of the Social Stock Exchange where she focussed on leveraging innovative social finance instruments towards social impact and now is an Advisor with Essilor for the USD 7mn Development Impact Bond in the livelihoods space.

She believes that while the development sector sees less gender disparity than the corporate sector, there is still a need for greater representation of women in common platforms. Hence, it becomes imperative to give opportunities through more scholarships to women (including L& D opportunities at work), hire more women in senior positions and to encourage more women to voice their opinions by inviting them to participate in different forums. ATE Chandra Foundation has taken many small and big steps to ensure the same. One example is the fact that Amit Chandra only participates in a panel if there is women representation and avoids 'manels' and at the Foundation level there is a bias in favour of hiring women at senior positions. She also believes that while options like flexi-timing and work-from-home are important, giving them to only women reinforces gender stereotypes as it defines that only women need benefits like these since only they are primarily responsible for home & child care. Hence, it also becomes important to extend these benefits to men to move towards greater equality at multiple levels in society.

She has found great value in peer-to-peer networking given sharp leanings in manoeuvring professional challenges and dealing with complex situations optimally. She hopes that the sector as a whole begins to understand that women find it difficult to network, while straddling both work and home front, and starts to solve for this in a systemic manner to allow immersive engagements. Women play a very important role in nurturing the next line of women leaders, as well as making opportunities available to them. According to her, the three qualities that every leader should have are humility, ability to walk your talk and being nurturing, i.e. investing in the team.

## Priyanka Dutt
## Country Director, BBC Media Action (India)

Priyanka has over two decades of experience in the private and development sector. At BBC Media Action, Priyanka has helmed multiple projects in the fields of health, rights and resilience by using her expertise in media, communication and technology to create social impact.

Priyanka elucidates her journey as a leader by showing up for opportunities that she believes and is interested in. Her biggest step towards being a leader was moving from the position of Project Director to Country Director at BBC Media Action. The process involved asking for help, taking help from peers, mentoring and executive coaching, in addition to participating in formal leadership training sessions. These all attributed to the kind of leader she aspired to be.

Mentoring has been a critical part of Priyanka's management and leadership. Her caliber was identified while substituting for a colleague during their absence. Her then senior saw potential and took the effort and commitment to be a mentor for Priyanka in her professional journey. Priyanka believes mentoring means to be able to give control. It is allowing your mentee to take the wheel and if they fail, being able step in and support them.

In terms of the kind support and encouragement that exists today for women leaders, Priyanka believes that the key gap lies in the dearth of structured programs in management and leadership for women leaders. Although there has been immense progress in setting up the structures, there is room for more. When it comes to increasing women's participation in the sector, Priyanka believes that men can professionally play a vital role in standing up for gender inequalities they encounter, and, in normalising gender neutral language at workplaces.

Ranu Bhogal
Director- Policy,
Research &
Campaigns,
Oxfam India

With a career spanning more than three decades in the development sector, Ranu's leadership journey is one of grit and determination. In her current role, Ranu has ensured that she is able to create an inclusive environment that allows women to grow as professionals. This is quite different from how it was when Ranu started her own journey in the development world. Starting her career with an established organisation, Ranu was able to create an impact early on in her career. However, there were times that her gender proved to be a challenge. For instance, during her pregnancy she was advised to resign by the head of the organisation (the person felt that she would not be able to handle the demands of her job in the long run).

Ranu feels that for women to move up the leadership ladder, the journey is not an easy one, since many a times, one has to choose between her career and family life, and the choice is seldom easy. Looking back, Ranu feels glad that she was able to do the balancing well and that gave her the renewed energy and focus to move ahead and arrive at the position where she is now.

Ranu's leadership story is reflective of perseverance and the effort in trying to make the best of the opportunities that came her way. Working with local NGOs in North, Central and East India, specialising in Gender, Natural Resource Management and Rural Development, Ranu feels that no experience is small and every small step she took led towards bigger roles in her life. In an effort to balance her personal priorities, for about twelve years, she worked as a Consultant. The consultancy job allowed her to take care of requirements at home and also gave her an extensive experience across different work streams, organisations and regions, something that allowed her to be well placed to utilise emerging and interesting employment opportunities.

Ranu feels that many women have in them to be leaders but it just requires the right nurturing & mentoring for them to succeed as leaders.

Renana Jhabvala
Chairperson,
SEWA Bharat

Renanaben was doing her PhD at Yale University when on a trip back to India, she began to question her privilege after the poverty she saw in the country. She decided to take some time off from Yale to work for the welfare of the people and joined SEWA, which was referred to her by her parents, after being connected to the founder, Ela Bhatt.

As a part of SEWA, Renanaben started working with a group of women who made quilt covers for a living. Since they were earning very less, she intervened to get them higher rates for their work. While they won the negotiation, the employer fired some of the women. That is when Renanaben built the first cooperative with these women as a part of SEWA. She eventually ended up taking leaves of absence for 3 years from Yale before finally leaving her PhD to join SEWA full time. At a time, when her classmates were joining organizations like the World Bank, her conviction and resolve to work for the  underrepresented at SEWA was strong. Her grandfather, who had been a unionist, was also a source of inspiration for her to work for the welfare of informal workers. Ela Bhatt and her husband were also great mentors for her who enabled her to keep an eye on the bigger vision everytime she got frustrated with day to day work.

During her brief time away from SEWA, she started writing a newspaper column- 'women we barely know'- and realised the importance of using your writing- your voice- as a way to bridge the gap between the women she worked with, and the larger world. Renanben eventually took on many roles at SEWA, including leading managerial work at SEWA once Ela Bhatt got nominated to the Rajya Sabha, starting SEWA Bharat, to serve as an umbrella organisation for all other SEWA sister organisations, starting a bank as well as housing entity for SEWA, to name a few. Renanaben also served on the boards of many other organisations as well as the VC of a university. At SEWA, she represented the organisation at international levels- to present the issues on the ground in manner to act as a bridge between the people she was presenting to and the women on the ground, ie connecting India on the ground with the world.

In terms of the power of networks, Renanben believes that they must have a common, larger vision they work towards and include the right people, to succeed. According to Renanaben, the real DNA of SEWA is the membership of women in the informal economy and their connection to the ground and the reason why SEWA works is because these women are SEWA and that they are heard and are empathetic to one another.

# Renu Shah
## Founder,
## Shakti - The
## Empathy Project

Renu Shah is a development sector 'entrepreneur' with close to 20 years of experience, of which more than half has been in the development sector. She has also worked as Director, South Asia for Changemaker Schools at Ashoka - Innovators for the Public and has founded Project PEHAL, an education based NGO in the past and more recently she founded Shakti - The Empathy Project, an incubation program for women social entrepreneurs in the early stages of their start-ups.

She believes that for a lot of women, professional and personal lives end up being sewn together and hence, there is a need for women to be formally mentored by empathetic leaders who not only help them navigate through the professional world successfully, but also understand and support the dual responsibilities that women have. Having experienced these problems first hand, she decided to start Shakti - the Empathy Project, an incubation cum mentorship program to support women led ventures in the sector. For organisations to be truly successful and diverse, there needs to be a conscious effort to hire and retain women, since currently there are not enough women in the talent pipeline. Some policies such as strong POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) policy, maternity leave, flexible hours, options to work from home and a supportive post maternity culture are non negotiable according to her. For a sector that provides many travel opportunities, a lot of men and younger people end up getting these by virtue of them being mobile. There is a need for organisations to alter these opportunities in a way that is equitable for everyone.

She has had to prove herself over and over again - to her juniors as well as her seniors, a challenge that she notices is peculiar to women. It was during her time at Harvard (as an MPA student) that she got the opportunity to attend a class to understand gender dynamics and their prevalence in the workplace. She learnt that such is the disparity in the professional environment that even the colour of the lipstick that a woman wears impacts how she is perceived. For women's causes to finally be successful, there is a need for men to understand that they are important stakeholders in this issue and to bear responsibility - both at work and at home, starting by giving women the space that has inadvertently been taken away from them, or was never given in the first place.

# Rukmini Banerji
## CEO,
## Pratham Education Foundation

Rukmini Banerji trained as an economist and earned her PhD from University of Chicago. She has an extensive experience in program design and delivery and has played key roles in developing and implementing Pratham's partnership programs with governments. According to her, there is a culture of growing within the organisation and respect that comes from working on the field, leading teams, managing partnerships and relationships in Pratham. Having worked with Pratham for 20 years, she stepped into the role of CEO five years ago.

Rukmini believes in having a conducive environment where clear goals are developed via discussions with the team. Leaders and teams have to own the goals and also need freedom and flexibility to reach those goals with their ideas and strategies. Over the years, Pratham has become a place where leaders grow. They learn to ask for help at the right time, to take responsibility, be creative and yet, accountable. Rukmini spoke about many young people who join Pratham, learn within the organisation, leave to pursue other roles/studies and then return to Pratham to implement their learnings. She also spoke of the very strong alumni network over the years that supports and leans on each other, with the values they inculcated during their time at Pratham.

Being an organisation that works in different blocks and districts, ensuring the safety of women becomes a primary responsibility. Along with necessary policies and their implementation, Pratham has implemented different methods to ensure safety such as sending two or more women together for a field visit, encouraging women to bring their families on the ground to see the work they do and so on.

Given that for many employees, Pratham is the first organisation they join, it is very important to have female role models within the organisation and because many people learn on the job, it is important for them to have others like themselves who are a few steps ahead, to look up to and to emulate. She believes that for many women who are entering the workforce, their female seniors play an important role. Hence, the culture of support and growth has been inculcated in each layer of the organisation, and it trickles down from the leadership. For example - she still gets calls from parents (of team members) to check whether their children are doing well. She also mentioned how many women have fought against all odds to work and their grit and determination have been a source of inspiration to everyone at Pratham.

In order to be a good team leader, it becomes important to think of your team in a holistic way - to create a team that cares about you and respects you outside of work. Another key skill is to be able to communicate - very transparently - whatever the organisation is going through. For example, when the Covid-19 crisis had started and the leadership was unsure regarding the financial situation, they made a serious effort to communicate the same to the entire team of close to 8,000 members. They did this remotely via 400-500 zoom calls with different teams through the organisation. She saw how the value system and trust plays a very important role in holding teams together, especially in tough times.

In terms of the relevance of networking, Rukmini feels that it is more important to develop long term relationships and connections that one can count on. She stated that women have an inherent and a learnt ability to juggle multiple tasks, be it work or home, that enables them to lead and excel in the work they do.

**Sabina Dewan
Founder and Executive Director,
JustJobs Network**

Sabina Dewan is the Founder and Executive Director of JustJobs Network, an innovative international think tank focusing on finding strategies to create more and better employment worldwide. Within this domain, her research examines how technology, climate change and the restructuring of trade into value chains are upending traditional employment models and the differential impacts of these forces on women, and on different socio-economic groups. Her career has spanned many multilateral institutions such as the International Labour Organisation, and the European Commission, as well as grassroots organisations. Sabina is a frequent media contributor and has appeared in The Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post, CNN, BBC, Al-Jazeera, TimesNow and NDTV to name a few.

Sabina attributes the beginning of her leadership journey to her professor who motivated her to excel and grow as a professional and an intellectual. In her first job at a market research corporation, Sabina experienced working with a boss that pushed her beyond her limits - in retrospect, this helped Sabina realise her true potential. Sabina says, to be a leader, one must develop confidence and the courage to own up to what you know, and more importantly, what you do not know. This is the first expression of ones willingness to learn. Sabina alludes to 'mentorship' being extremely important in ones leadership journey. She admits that she was extremely fortunate to have mentors and networks that helped nurture her learning, confidence, and helped her climb the leadership ladder and start her own organisation.

Upbringing and education have a lot to do with paving the way for a woman to become a leader, Sabina notes. She recognises the privilege of a family that could educate her and help her access opportunities in life. Education builds a foundation of knowledge that experience builds upon. The combination of the two help individuals learn to think for themselves and problem solve - critical attributes for a leader. But not all women are fortunate enough to have access to good quality education and opportunities; they face impediments in both personal and professional arenas.

Women continue to face sexism in professional environments; sometimes it is flagrant and other times it is unintentional. She recalls examples when male bosses were much more comfortable socialising with male employees giving them a leg-up on assignments or being in meetings where men, particularly older men, thought it okay to be patronising towards young women, interrupting and 'mansplaining'. There is a need to chip away at making workplace culture neutral and equal for all genders.

In order to nurture women's leadership at the workplace Sabina recommends organisations to have: 1) Mentorship programs - one-on-one or peer to peer; 2) More networking opportunities for women; and 3) Robust organisational policies that support women's participation.

In conclusion, Sabina notes that men are often blind to the privilege they enjoy. For all the criticism of Sheryl Sandberg, she did say, "We cannot change what we are not aware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change." This is a message that she hopes men will take to heart.

**Safeena Husain
Founder and Executive
Director,
Educate Girls**

Safeena is the founder and executive director of Educate Girls (EG), an NGO focused on mobilising communities for girls' education. Under Safeena's leadership, since EG's inception in 2007, the NGO has enrolled 750,000+ girls in school and has seen improved learning outcomes for 1.3 million+ children in India.

Safeena's guidance and leadership has been instrumental in EG achieving a major global milestone – the world's first Development Impact Bond in education. On its completion, the bond surpassed both its target outcomes by achieving 160% of its learning target and 116% of its enrolment target. These results are testimony to EG's commitment to deliver quality at scale (the organisation currently has 1,760 full time employees and 13,000+ community volunteers) and value to every single child in the program. She has also been instrumental in EG becoming the first Audacious project in Asia, a first-of-its-kind coalition that surfaces and funds critical projects with the potential to create global change.

According to Safeena, a leader's job is to define the problem they want to solve and have the vision for success. Safeena feels that learning to accept her abilities, as well as her limitations have helped her transition as a leader. However, as a leader, this transition phase never ceases, as one has to continue to adapt and guide, with new employees and new ideas that come to the fore. In Safeena's opinion, a leader in the social sector needs to balance having the courage to not accept the status quo, and at the same time have immense patience, as most social sector models work towards behaviour change, which is a long drawn process. Coupled with this, the leader needs to ensure that their teams have the energy, enthusiasm, requisite skills and capabilities to deal with the challenges that come their way.

In terms of policies and systems for increased women's participation, Safeena advises organisations to adapt its work culture with a gender lens. One of EG's core values is gender equity and this is demonstrated with the many women in leadership roles. Further, having regular training that promotes gender equity is key to promoting women's participation in the organisation.

In terms of mentorship, Safeena shares that having a mentor or coach early on in one's career is crucial, especially when one is grappling with hard decisions. Peer support, i.e. learning from those who have already been in the situation with hands-on experience is also key. Safeena is a part of a peer group, where several female social entrepreneurs discuss and reflect on the challenges they face in their day to day operations. This peer support guides Safeena towards her goal and also gives her a reality check from time to time. Safeena also deems networking to be an important aspect in the social sector in order to keep up with the happenings, and to showcase one's work and get insights and feedback from them.

Previously, Safeena has worked extensively with rural and urban underserved communities in South America, Africa and Asia. She has been conferred with the 2017 NITI Aayog's Women Transforming India Award, the 2016 NDTV-L'Oréal Paris Women of Worth Award, and has in the past received the British Asian Trust's Special Recognition Award from HRH Prince Charles for outstanding contribution in education. Moreover, Educate Girls has received the prestigious 2015 Skoll Award, 2014 WISE Award, the 2014 USAID Millennium Alliance Award, the 2014 Stars Impact Award and the India Development Marketplace Award in 2011 from the World Bank.

**Sakshi Gudwani**
**Senior Program Officer,**
**Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

Sakshi comes with substantial experience, having worked with stakeholders across the private, public, and the development sector. Currently, as a Senior Program Officer at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Sakshi actively manages its initiatives concerning water, sanitation, and hygiene (WSH) in India. With a focus on program design, institutional strengthening and capacity building, strategic communications, and policy and advocacy, she has been working on various other projects at the Foundation as well, most notably the Avahan program for HIV prevention in India.

Sakshi graduated with an MBA from IIM, Lucknow and began her career as a consultant at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). At BCG, she eventually began working on social impact projects, which influenced her to move to the development sector. Seven years ago, she joined the BMGF where her first project was the Avahan program for HIV prevention. She joined the program at a very critical stage, when it was transitioning to the government, and this experience provided her an in-depth knowledge very early on in her social impact career. With a desire to see through programs from start to end, Sakshi began leading the WSH programs. Her experience of working with 10 to 20 different stakeholders, at a time, including NGOs, governments and other contributors on minimal resources, opened an aura of multiple perspectives for her.

When it comes to gender in the development sector, Sakshi believes it is not about gender diversity but gender equality. In Sakshi's experience, the development sector sometimes carries biases that arise from intergenerational gender norms or through application in program implementation, that indirectly influence beneficiaries. For instance, Sakshi explains that it is not enough to provide toilets under social programs but to ensure their safety and usage for men and women alike. Sakshi believes organisational integration of gender should be deliberate, something she has seen being implemented by the Foundation.

To grow as a leader, Sakshi swears by mentorship in a meritocratic organisation. Comparing her experience of the corporate and the development world, Sakshi believes that the development sector does not do enough to foster mentorship. This may be because the development sector is overwhelmed with its own concerns and sparse resources that mentorship is sidelined in the process. She believes that for leaders to grow, talent needs to be motivated - this motivation may not always be financial, but about growth and learning. Personally, Sakshi had earlier in her career shied away from seeking mentors, but today has a support system of mentors to fall back on. She believes that women leaders may often feel the imposter syndrome as she did and due attention needs to be given to such concerns. Her advice for women experiencing this would be to seek support and lay out their own pathways, breaking barriers that come in the way of their leadership journey.

## Seema Bansal
Director,
Boston Consulting
Group, India

When Seema Bansal joined Boston Consulting Group (BCG) two decades ago, she was told that with her joining, the number of women in the organisation would double. 20 years hence, there are 200 women at BCG India and Seema has been instrumental in not only building the impact sector practice at BCG but also in making BCG more diverse and inclusive where women have been able to grow and prosper.

A couple of years into her journey at BCG, Seema felt the need to do some more- to learn about and try out the impact sector. She felt comfortable to have these conversations at BCG and she was given the opportunity to craft this work within BCG to start the impact practice, a journey she considers interesting and successful. Under her leadership, the impact practice has come from a time of doing only pro-bono development consulting work to being completely independent and a profitable vertical now. She strongly believes that the most important resource that this sector needs is human resource - people who are willing to spend years trying to solve one problem, due to the complex nature of the challenges that the sector deals with.

Some of the skills that she believes all leaders should have are having the ability to show one's vulnerabilities, tying the bigger picture to their daily struggles and being available for your team. She believes that women are far more open to listening, being collaborative and saying 'I don't know all the answers but collaboratively we can come up with the answers', and that is a skill that should especially be valued in the development sector. She shares that when one finds it difficult to manage work and home and is torn between priorities, one ought to park that decision making to when they are not at their most vulnerable self and take the decision more pragmatically. She stresses that one doesn't need to strive for perfection in everything, one can be good in a few things, not good in a few things and perfect in others.

She has seen the company go through a commedable journey with respect to gender. From a time of having just 2 women, they now have 10+ women leaders and 200+ women employees. Many factors have contributed to this growth. While having strong policies are important, Seema believes that they are still a small part of the whole story. Some other things organisations need to consider are: Are there enough women in the recruitment pipeline? Is there diversity in the hiring panel? While doing employee reviews, are you ensuring that the metrics are gender neutral? Are you ensuring that the work environment is safe and conducive to women's growth? How are you supporting women through critical periods of their life such as during marriage or maternity? If you want to retain a woman for more than 20 years, are you supporting her during the 3-4 years she needs to concentrate on her child/home? Are you offering enough support, L&D and mentoring opportunities to ensure that women stay in the workforce? Hence, from recruitment to performance reviews, from day to day support to support during exceptional times, organisations need to think about, and plan for everything.

She believes that women who have the opportunity and privilege to make a difference for all the other women, should step up and help set systems that make workplaces gender inclusive and enable better women representation and participation, something Seema has been doing for years and as she says in her own words, "If not me, then who?"

**Shalini Sarin**
Director,
Elektromobilitat
and Chair Center for
Clean Energy,
Plaksha University
Board member, Executive
Coach, CHRO &
Strategic Advisor

Shalini Sarin's experience ranges from Chief People Officer to head of Corporate Social Responsibility to Business Leader, for the base of the pyramid solar lighting businesses for social impact. Profit with a purpose and passion is her mantra and belief. She has worked across India, Europe and the US and now, she serves on several boards for for-profit & non-profit social organisations. She is also an executive coach and a strategic advisor on HR, CSR, sustainability, transformation and leadership.

Shalini's journey as a leader in the sector is credited to her own self belief, support from family and setting the right expectations for her career path. Shalini says, if she had to go by her professional qualifications alone, she would have been in Human Resource Management all her life. She took the chance and explored opportunities beyond HR management that served her drive and passion.

Shalini believes that women need to take risks and negotiate their way through stereotypes, norms and perceptions that exist within societies and their own families. She also believes that it is important for women to have their careers in place, and have the ability to make choices on the trade-offs they are ready to make. Shalini emphasises that women leaders should not shy away from being financially literate and have a hold of investments and finances as it is a critical aspect of empowerment and being independent. In Shalini's opinion, the development sector has been naturally attracting more women due to the flexibility and lack of structure, whereas the corporate sector has to make structural and conscious efforts towards inclusion and gender diversity at the workplace. Today, both sectors have the need to learn from each other as we need flexibility as well as structure to get scale and a consistent approach. Serving as a board member of both for-profit and non-profit organisations, Shalini infers, discussions around gender are sidelined in non-profit organisations as other critical issues overtake. The conversation to encourage women leaders and gender inclusivity must be a conscious and deliberate effort to create pathways for women to grow.

## Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja
## Managing Director, Central Square Foundation

Shaveta is currently the Managing Director at Central Square Foundation (CSF). She is an Economics graduate who came from a family of professionals who encouraged her to follow the norm of taking CAT exam, doing MBA and joining one of the most coveted consulting firms, Boston Consulting Group. While Shaveta was keen to work for the society and create an impact, she did not perceive it to be a viable career path, given the mindset at the time of a career in social impact being of one wearing khadi, walking with a jhola and protesting at Jantar Mantar.

The next decade saw Shaveta achieve much professional growth in the corporate sector, which included working for a startup that allowed her to learn more by managing a variety of tasks. This journey of working with great brands, managers, mentors and companies came to a halt as she decided to take a sabbatical for close to 5 years to manage motherhood. To keep herself professionally active during this sabbatical, she dabbled with the idea of academia and kept herself busy as visiting faculty in business schools, which kept her intellectually engaged while allowing space for prioritising personal commitments.

At around this time the impact sector was becoming more strategic and Shaveta joined Central Square Foundation (CSF) as a founding team member in 2012 and has been fortunate to grow in the sector along with CSF's own growth. The learning has been tremendous, and Shaveta feels that the level of empowerment, ownership and stretch growth that comes in an entrepreneurial start-up role has been instrumental in her personal growth as well.

Shaveta is a big believer in the need of mentors and has greatly benefited from her mentors. She feels it is very helpful if the mentor is someone who can be an advisor for the longer term and the mentor and mentee are able to work on investing in sustaining the relationship. She stressed on the power and importance of informal mentoring networks. At different stages in our life and careers, there may be a need for more formal mentee-mentor relationships or leadership and life coaching. Further, we many need mentors for a specific project or for a specific subject and it is important to recognise that need. Mentors can also be role models in your personal life - family, friends and so on; where role models morph into the role of mentors. Regarding networking, she feels that networking needs to be looked beyond the fast paced place to make connections it is perceived as, to a more collaborative and collective working together system.

Shaveta shared that the world of work for women has changed over the years, from how things were at her parents' time to even when Shaveta commenced her career, there has been progress, but it is not enough and hence, we need to ensure that gender continues to be a topic of discussion and action. She shared that there are inherent gender biases we all have, big or small; what is important is to recognise it and work towards the same. There is an urgent need to challenge subtle assumptions we have about gender and create a culture where all women, regardless of how assertive or soft spoken they are, have a voice. Things will not change on their own.

**Shireen Vakil**
**Head of Policy and**
**Advocacy,**
**Tata Trusts**

Shireen Vakil is currently the Head of Policy and Advocacy at Tata Trusts. She began her journey in the development sector as a part of Save The Children - both in India and UK, working with the organisation for 17 years before moving on to Tata Trusts five years ago.

Shireen shares that one the most significant support systems that helped in her transition to becoming a leader was one of her first managers, who influenced her decision making, was a great mentor and pushed her to learn new skills, by signing up for courses even when Shireen was very reluctant to do them. Later on, when Shireen decided to take a break from work to be there for her children, her senior gave her flexibility of a 'job share' - an arrangement where two people share the work and get paid for a single full-time job. Her manager guided her to keep track of all the extra time she put in and ensured Shireen was credited for any extra work that she took on and was supported through the journey, emotionally and professionally, by pushing her to take on more opportunities and learn better. As a manager, Shireen tries to implement a lot of the things her managers did for her.

Shireen believes that organisations need to have a clear plan and targets across all levels to ensure diversity; this can include policies around hiring, HR and management processes. Organisations need to realise the relevance of what is lost, in terms of performance or functioning of the organisation, when they do not hire or support enough women. Senior male leaders in organisations need to be sensitised and be more empathetic - especially to the idea of women returning to work after maternity leave and other such issues. The expectation that everybody should be available 24/7 needs to change; boundaries have to be set and maintained religiously. When Shireen pushed back on emails during weekends, she received a lot of resistance, which was not acceptable to her. She understands that such conversations could lead to conflict and can make many people uncomfortable - but that doesn't mean we should stop having them.

Shireen credits her spouse for the immense support he gave her in being able to manage work and home and believes that the power of support from great mentors and family members can not be underestimated and are extremely instrumental in enabling women leaders to grow. She believes in the need for senior women in the leadership teams to have a sense of camaraderie and friendship - to be able to have each other's backs and support one other. Additionally, networking platforms where women can get together and share their challenges and support each other are also very important in her opinion.

The key skills she believes every leader must have are: having a clear vision for the organisation, having the ability to communicate that vision across the organisation, across all levels, to create collective buy-in, strong decision making abilities, courage and empathy.

**Shloka Nath**
**Head - Sustainability and Special Projects at Tata Trusts and Executive Director, India Climate Collaborative**

Shloka Nath, who is currently the Head - Sustainability and Special Projects at Tata Trusts and Executive Director, India Climate Collaborative, did not have a 'linear' career path, in her own words. She followed her curiosity and quest to learn and traversed around various fields, building her career. This reflected early on even during her undergraduate studies at the London School of Economics, when she moved from English to Political Science and Governance policy, following her curiosity. She credits her parents for giving her the freedom to explore and build a self driven career, on principles of hard work and ambition.

Shloka spent the first decade of her career as a journalist, fascinated by the power of information, a fundamental public good, to spread awareness and create lasting impact. In the UK, she worked as a speechwriter at the House of Lords and later, joined BBC London, working on current affairs. When she moved to India, she joined NDTV, where as a news anchor, she got greater insights into the current political economy and socio- political - economic issues, closer to the ground. While immensely rewarding, she did not perceive this line of work as sustainable for her as it was too reactive and she did not get the chance to truly reflect. Wanting to move to print media, she joined the team that was launching Forbes in India. Ironically, this transition to understanding capitalism, financial markets and the private sector brought her closer to understanding the impact of policy on the lives of people at the bottom of the pyramid and her development sector focus rose and she did extensive coverage on areas including microfinance, for which she was awarded.

To better understand public policy, she went to policy school at Harvard and came back and worked as a campaign manager in Mumbai for an MLA; work that ranged from designing the communications strategy, to canvassing on the ground. However, life soon came full circle for Shloka. Brought up in a family of wildlife conservationists, Shloka was always very close to environmental issues. Deeply influenced by her brother, an environmentalist, who had passed away a few years earlier during her time at Harvard, Shloka began to explore opportunities linked to the environment and wildlife conversation. And, hence, came on board as the Executive Director at India Climate Collaborative. To join Tata Trusts and consider starting a new vertical at a very old organisation was a very fascinating learning experience. Under her leadership, the vertical now has 50+ partners and multiple programs running as a part of it. The skills she gained from all her past experiences have contributed to her success in this field, which she considers her calling.

Another interesting part of her career journey was that Shloka co-founded India's first impact gender lens investing fund, with women-only investors. Shloka was one of the investors and continues to be an angel investor in many other social enterprises. The fund ran for three years, raising between two to five million dollars. The idea of this venture was to make sure that more and more women are heard and become a part of boards of different impact organisations. The learning from the experience was that women need more working capital and not equity. She believes that since the work in the development sector is very complex, we need more representation from women, who she considers to be great problem solvers. According to her, there is a power imbalance in the sector with the NGOs being led by women and the philanthropies being led by men- a gap that needs to be addressed and closed.

**Shriya Sethi
Country Director,
International
Innovation Corps**

Shriya grew up in a business family and set up her own business right after college, as a part of the family business. As with most businesses, the targets were capitalistic and restricted to maximising profit. It was during her time at business school that Shriya got the opportunity to broaden her horizon, learn more about motives beyond profit for businesses as well as the differences between a manager/boss and a leader. After business school, she joined McKinsey, where her understanding of what truly constitutes the idea of leadership developed further. She imbibed traits she learnt from her managers; who always had her back, took accountability for the work done as a team, encouraged work on personal development and emphasised soft skills, management skills and excellence and the importance of constructive feedback.

Some years hence, as she started a family and left McKinsey, she was clear that she was looking at something beyond consulting. At this time, talk about environmental hazards and climate change was gaining prominence and as a young mother, she wanted to work in the space where her work could make a difference in the lives of her children and the generations to come. With that in mind, she joined the International Innovation Corps (IIC). The past few years have been exciting; she has had the opportunity to work across sectors, interact with stakeholders at every level and gotten a closer look into the impact ecosystem in India. This entrepreneurial opportunity has enabled her to grow within the organisation and given her the opportunity to relate with everyone who works across levels. Over the years, her experiences with difficult managers has been ultimately rewarding as it showed her exactly what not to do .

In terms of the IIC fellowship, she shares that the cohort is gender balanced though they try to look at selection purely on merit. The fellows are trained on sessions such as being a woman in Bureaucracy that helps them understand what to expect in a government office and how to manage oneself and look out for peers. Another training is to help sensitise men on how to ensure that their women fellows are not sidelined when talking to bureaucrats. They are also trained to call out biases.

Shriya shared that leaders in the social sector can struggle with being able to compartmentalise the hardships one sees on the field with one's own privilege and personal life. In such instances, it is helpful for leaders to have someone to listen to or talk to, someone who would converse but not necessarily need to give advice. She feels that networking is the absolute key and critical in leadership positions. A lot of projects and funder relations she has secured have been on the basis of her networking skills. She feels that men play a very important role and goes both ways. Her husband has been instrumental in pushing her to take on many strategic professional decisions in her life and vice versa.

Shriya feels that the younger generation is more passionate, sensitive and aware about causes such as diversity and inclusion and the younger fellows have often pushed her to have difficult conversations. She feels that we need to create an environment that is safe for all genders and not one that is overprotective towards women. If anyone is feeling unsafe, it needs to be addressed.

## Smarinita Shetty
### Co-Founder and CEO, India Development Review

Smarinita Shetty is a development sector professional with close to 24 years of experience, divided equally between the corporate and impact sector. Her experience ranges from journalism to finance and consulting. While thinking about the idea of India Development Review (IDR), she spoke to more than 100 people in the sector to understand the gap in the market and the possible solutions. While it seemed like a herculean task to become a founder and the work that goes along with it, she realised that if she did not launch this at the time, she would eventually regret it. Hence, IDR, India's first and largest independent media platform for the development community, was born.

Smarinita strongly believes that women need to be given opportunities, only then will they be able to demonstrate their abilities and acquire confidence. Women need to be taught how to better position and promote themselves and their work as this is not something that comes naturally to them. She also believes that it is important to look for, and appoint women at a level higher than where they are at currently, as they might not always put themselves forward for roles that they have not yet demonstrated success in. The more women are pushed to take up these responsibilities, the more they will be able to demonstrate their abilities.

The culture of an organisation plays a very important role in extending support to women and that trickles down from how the leadership behaves. For example, if the leadership takes flexible hours themselves, and there are no penalties for doing so, the rest of the team becomes more open to it.

Regarding mentors, she believes that women should look to both men and women for this. Having senior men as mentors allows young women to understand how men think, act and work; more importantly it helps men understand where the women are coming from and their capabilities, aspirations and concerns. Hence, in case of training and other networking forums, these should be done for men and women together so that they can learn from each other and how to work together.

Smarinita is also an advocate of ensuring that men provide women access to the networks that might have inadvertently been closed off to them. She explains how networking events usually do not take into account the dual responsibilities that women have, at work and home, where staying late post- work for networking events might not always be possible for them. She believes that while just women-only networks are great platforms and build a space for camaraderie, problem solving and learning, they do not increase access or influence for women. This is because most existing networks – the ones with power and connections - still tend to be men-dominated. The onus should, therefore, be on the men to ensure access to these networks, as well as to ensure that women are able to participate by working around their dual responsibilities.

At home, while a lot of men have started contributing significantly to responsibilities and chores, the 'mental load' still rests on women and that is something that needs to be worked on moving forward. According to her, the world is ready, and waiting for, empathetic leaders, who lead from a place of knowledge and inclusion. Hence, it becomes imperative for women to be taught to be more confident and for organisations to consciously integrate gender differences in the way they support women.

## Sohini Bhattacharya
## President and CEO, Breakthrough

In 1983, Sohini was in college studying English Literature and was planning to go to the USA to complete her education. She had had a very liberal upbringing with her mother being a working woman and had grilled the idea of being independent-financially and otherwise- in her mind. Her active involvement and love for theatre led her to the development sector. She got an opportunity to volunteer with a non profit organisation that had recently received a grant to create communication material- through theatre and stories- for their target audience. She would travel to the rural areas every day to meet the beneficiaries, who were women living there. She had very real conversations with these women around households and violence, etc and was overwhelmed- she had never before met women from these backgrounds, facing these challenges and had never seen optimism in the face of such adversity. She worked there for six months and delayed her admission to the US university. This volunteering opportunity began her career in the sector.

Post this, she worked at many organisations such as Dastkar and Ashoka and also co-founded an organisation before finally joining Breakthrough. All these experiences gave her a fair idea about the challenges women face on the ground and how to lead teams and programs. Today, she is the CEO of Breakthrough- where she is managing a complex program and a large team.

Sohini believes in the idea of having equity at the workplace, i.e. the importance of having fairness at the workplace, by treating individuals differently depending on need. There are times when women find it easier to open up to, and place confidence in, other women and hence, according to Sohini, there is a need for women-only spaces to exist so that women leaders can help nurture another line of leaders. Three skills she believes every leader should have are self awareness, ability to listen, and the ability to have difficult conversations.

## Sriparna Ganguly Chaudhuri
### Independent Development Consultant

Sriparna's first tryst with understanding the needs of different segments of the population came during her MBA at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand. Armed with an MBA, Sriparna began climbing the corporate ladder as a Marketing and Brand Management specialist. After 14 years in the corporate world, Sriparna transitioned into the development sector by doing consulting assignments for The Hunger Project. Though times have changed, back when Sriparna joined the impact sector, she realised that her corporate experience had no real value. This setback notwithstanding, Sriparna decided to make a space for herself within the organisation: The key, she realised, is to understand that NGOs are vehicles that bring about change that communities think they need. It was imperative that one remembers the larger purpose, shed their ego and be willing to learn from scratch if needed. As Sriparna grew within The Hunger Project, her willingness to spend time on the field brought out her leadership qualities as she had to think on her feet, manage large teams and stakeholders with diverse backgrounds.

In Sriparna's opinion, few of the ways organisations can enable women to thrive are as follows: One, ensure there is no dichotomy and understand that cultural matches happen during hiring. Two, set up processes to ensure women get the right exposure, and are using their intellectual ability to the fullest. And three, set up robust learning, development and networking opportunities. Sriparna says, to be a good leader, it is important to understand an issue in detail. As you learn about the issue, ask for more responsibility within your organisation, but ensure that you are setting yourself up for it. Sriparna goes on to say, for a leader, it is critical to have a support structure in place and to be empathetic. It is also key to cultivate a global mindset - not just from a networking point of view, but also to understand the trends and discourse in your sector, across the globe.

As closing remarks, Sriparna advises to take risks, be courageous, observe what women and girls go through beyond their immediate surroundings, form a holistic worldview and be confident that you can make a difference.

**Subhalakshmi Nandi
Senior Program
Officer, Gender
Equality, India
Bill & Melinda Gates
Foundation**

As Subhalakshmi Nandi completed her undergraduate studies, she decided to take a year off to travel the country, volunteer and research for grassroots organizations, to strengthen her rural outlook and understanding of the development sector. This sector was not new to her, her sister worked for the same and Subhalakshmi had volunteered with PRAVAH during her school and college years. However, this year was a turning point for her in terms of gaining insights that would shape her career trajectory.

Subhalakshmi began her career at ANANDI, where she lived and worked in rural tribal Gujarat, getting greatly inspired by the women's collectives she worked with and with their vision for gender and social justice. Thereafter, she joined Nirantar and hence, in the first ~8 years of her career, Subhalakshmi, worked extensively with grassroots feminist collectives which also shaped her thinking and values about gender in the development sector. When asked what truly inspires her, Subhalakshmi shared that it is being close to the ground on the one hand, where tangible change is happening, as well as being part of a larger 'movement' for social change, on the other.

UN Women, the UN agency for gender equality, was Subhalakshmi's next professional move, where she got an opportunity to bring her own learnings and the voices of grassroots feminist leaders into mainstream policy discussions. This role transitioned into a leadership opportunity at The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and most recently, Subhalakshmi joined the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) where she plans to further the work on gender equality in India.

Subhalakshmi feels that a lot has changed for women and girls, much of it enabled by the activism of the women's movement and getting enabling laws in place - be it for equality in education and work, or for addressing domestic violence and workplace harassment. However, she feels we have a long way to go in shifting gender norms that still perpetuate women's role as complementary bread earners, and also does not factor in their unpaid work burden.

Subhalakshmi's work with feminist organisations enabled her to experience leadership that was collaborative, democratic, transparent and value driven. She says that leadership is not about positions, and it can mean different things to different people. For her, it is about collective ownership, practising what you preach, taking initiative, and having your team's back. It requires coupling accountability with having an eye on the bigger picture.

## Sumitra Mishra
## Executive Director,
## Mobile Creches

Sumitra, a post graduate in Special Education for persons with disabilities, comes with over twenty years of work experience in the development sector in India. While in school and college, Sumitra volunteered at a school for disbaled persons - a turning point which convinced her to do what she does today. The biggest source of learning in Sumitra's leadership journey was the opportunity to work directly with children and their families. She gets her moral courage from those experiences and uses them to make critical decisions today.

Sumitra states her most important transition in becoming a leader is attributed to: One, hard work - it had become her conviction and a way of life in which her work influenced her personal, professional and political life. Two, being honest, truthful and sincere at the workplace while asking for help and being open to learning from anyone. Three, having good mentors and role models to be inspired by, and learn from their mistakes. And finally, to be able to take quick and fair decisions - in a way to be reliable in problem solving and being there for your team, no matter what.

Sumitra acknowledges her privilege that enabled a good education which ultimately benefited her journey towards becoming a leader. She believes that she was fortunate enough to have bosses that were supportive, and organisations with flexible work policies, such as one that provided her an opportunity to bring her child to work, during the early period of her career. This, and other supportive policies, enabled her to continue her passion and ambition without any hindrances. In Sumitra's opinion, it is important for organisations to provide an equal platform for women to speak, question and make decisions.

Sumitra explains, women's leadership should be encouraged through two approaches, the bottoms up approach - wherein women leaders are recognised, supported, mentored, and cultivated. As a sector, it is necessary to support a leadership policy through the ranks at every level. At the same time, a top down approach is also needed to be implemented through gender transformative policies and programs starting from the Board Members, to senior management and every employee of an organisation.

## Uthara Narayanan
### Chief Changemaker and Managing Trustee, Buzz Women

Uthara Narayanan is a development sector professional with more than 10 years of experience. She is the co-founder and CEO of Buzz Women, an organization that works to empower rural women with knowledge, skills and attitude to take charge of their financial, personal and social problems and finding their own solutions.

Uthara was always sure of wanting to be a part of the development sector. She was greatly influenced by her father, who always encouraged independent thinking, and her mother, who was a very strong woman and a great role model for her. Growing up, she watched the show 'Udaan' which encouraged her to take the civil services exam. When that did not work out, she entered the development sector as a volunteer at Janaagraha. After working there for more than 2 years, she took a break to introspect her 'why' or purpose. The first terms that came to her mind immediately were 'women', 'rural' and 'poverty', which led her towards wanting to work at the grassroots level. Further research helped her understand that while money is an important factor to reduce poverty, there are many other deep rooted issues that need to be addressed as well. All of this led to the formation of Buzz Women.

In her own journey, Uthara has seen a lot of women suffer from self doubt and low confidence, and women who do not think very highly of themselves. She herself went through a phase of self-doubt even after a very supportive upbringing. What helped her overcome that was her self reflection and the coaching that she received. She believes that organisations must invest in long term leadership trainings and individual mentoring that not only focus on technical skills but also help people discover and reflect - help them achieve self-awareness. This would allow them to understand who they are, differentiate their roles in personal and professional lives and bring out soft skills like self-efficacy, agency, mindfulness, empathy, situational leadership to surface.

Since we live in a society where inadvertently, the voices of men are heard more, she actively chooses to see the importance of consciously coaching yourself to reduce your inherent biases, for both men and women. Questions like, "Am I propagating gender bias, even subconsciously? Am I treating women equally in terms of the support and in the language that I use?" require a lot of observation, both consciously and subconsciously which is brought up periodically in team meetings within Buzz. Women need to also encourage themselves to point out biases within their organisations. Uthara insisted on consciously hiring more women especially in the field operations and that too from rural areas to give more opportunities to marginalised women. Currently 55% of the team in Buzz consists of women.

According to Uthara, every organisation, especially the social sector must have leaders that bring a balance of masculine and feminine elements. All leaders must be detail oriented, empathic and have self-awareness.
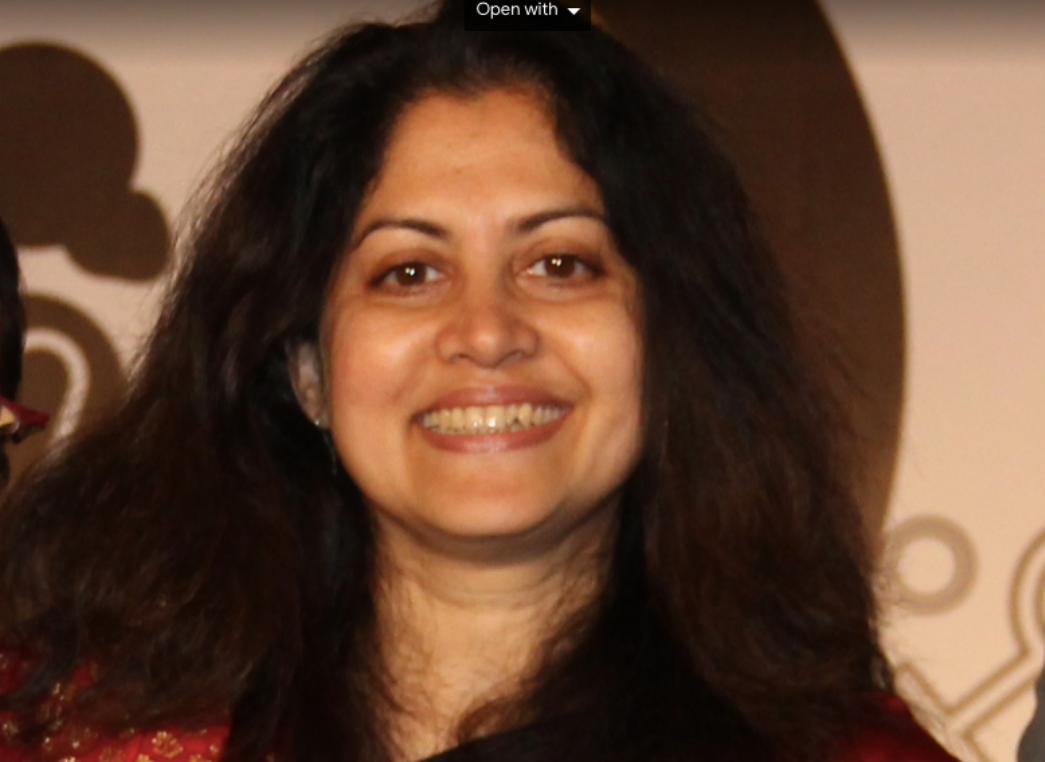
# Vanessa D'Souza
## CEO,
## SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action)

Vanessa D'Souza had worked in the corporate sector for over 20 years, most recently as Director, Citigroup Private Bank, before she decided to volunteer at SNEHA. This volunteering opportunity ultimately transitioned into her taking on the role of CEO at SNEHA, a role she took over from SNEHA's former CEO in 2013. This transition was not an easy one. Not only was the development sector altogether new for her, Vanessa did not come from a public health or research background, which was an important part of SNEHA and further, this was a hardcore implementing organization requiring experience in the social sector, very different from Vanessa's previous experiences.

To manage this transition, Vanessa decided not to make too many changes in the organisation for the first 6 to 12 months, except in areas that were her expertise such as finance, fundraising and communication. While there were things in the interim she wanted to change, she consciously slowed down on making changes because she wanted to know enough before she did so. She had weekly meetings with the founder and a Trustee board member and discussed her concerns. These gave her a great sense of the priorities and values of the organisation, an immense learning for her. Not being from the sector, she could bring complementary perspectives, skills and experiences that were different from what people there had. She feels that it is very important to understand the culture of the organisation and what truly drives people to be in that organisation. This is what helps one make decisions. Further, this participatory leadership ensures greater buy-in from all stakeholders.

She elaborated upon the mistakes that she feels people from the corporate sector make while transitioning to the development sector. The attitude that they know better than people in the social sector not only rubs people the wrong way but also restricts the person's learning. Further, one needs to learn to listen, respect and understand that NGOs have a very strong value-driven approach. Also, it is a complete fallacy that work in the development sector is easy. The work never switches off!

In terms of gender representation, she feels that NGOs often have many more men than women in their board composition. This is detrimental, especially when issues being discussed are those of women's empowerment – a gender balance brings in different perspectives. In terms of mentorship and coaching, SNEHA has a strong culture. One of SNEHA's board members is a professional coach and there are sessions of one-on-one coaching at SNEHA. However, here too there can be better gender representation by increasing the number of women coaches. She feels that given people working in the social sector may deal with more emotional baggage by virtue of the social issues they manage, coaching and mentoring can be helpful. In terms of networking, Vanessa feels that it is essential to any leadership role as it is exceedingly critical for fundraising, partnerships and collaborations.

Regarding the role of men in the lives of women, Vanessa feels that when men have partners who are working, they are able to better empathise with their female colleagues and contribute to their participation at the workplace better.

Vidya Shah
CEO,
EdelGive Foundation

In 2000, Vidya Shah decided to leave a successful 11-year career in investment banking that she was not enjoying anymore. She joined Edelweiss, and being pregnant with her second child, thought of it as a great part time opportunity. It ended up being more than a full-time opportunity that helped round her skills, not only with finance but also on how to build an organisation. 20 years hence, this experience has enabled her to successfully build EdelGive Foundation from scratch.

In 2007, Vidya pursued the idea of starting EdelGive Foundation. While she did not have a lot of understanding of the development sector, she had the skills, willingness and passion to run an effective organisation. The founding team was a team of six women, who were chosen carefully for their complementary skill sets. She made visits to different programs across the country that gave her a clear understanding of the skills that she did not have and helped her recognise the balance between emotion and rationale that is needed to make any program successful. She says that she learnt who not to be from her first boss, working with whom was challenging. It made her understand that good leaders need to have a strong Emotional Quotient (EQ), be empathetic, non-judgemental, and above all not only get leverage from but also provide mentoring and growth opportunities for their teams. She also learnt the importance of self-awareness and asking more questions - traits she considers important till date.

Vidya believes that an organisation can do many things to make the workplace safer and more conducive to women's growth. She believes that women not only need safe working spaces but also thoughtful support on pathways to growing and strengthening their careers. An absence of this has led to far few women holding senior leadership positions. From creating more women's forums and having strict POSH and other policies, to the most minute details such as regulating office temperature, providing support with commute and good canteen facilities, EdelGive and Edelweiss have taken several steps to promote the growth of women within the organisation. However, while policies are helpful, it is also important to provide women support so that they do not quit the workforce, or if they do, they do it after making a calculated choice. She believes that young women should seek both male and female mentors as both bring different perspectives and skills that one can benefit from. Further, it is helpful to have mentors who bring both emotional and analytical perspectives to the table.

While she believes that networking is important, she also believes that women should learn to look at networks as relationships. She encourages women to think and make bolder visions, that they often hesitate to do. For real growth, more and more women need to be at the forefront of running organisations and working at the helm of businesses and enterprises and not just in support functions.

It is with this belief that Vidya continues to promote the need for women to be in critical decision-making positions across critical business functions. Of all the different roles she has in life, the role of a mentor to young women, is the one she cherishes the most.

## Yasmin Ali Haque
## Representative, UNICEF India

Yasmin's leadership journey began in school, first as the head of her school house and then as the school head girl. Yasmin grew up in a household with three brothers, where her parents treated all their children the same; everyone had the same rules and same responsibilities. This conducive environment enabled her to take risks and not be defensive. Yasmin's relief efforts began in school and continued into college; these experiences taught her how to work with people and bring them together.

UNICEF for Yasmin has been a place where her vocation and avocation came together and she feels privileged to have had the opportunity over the past three decades to work for children's and women's rights, travelling the length and breadth of her own country as well as across the globe. She learnt greatly about access to public health, coupled with women's rights and the social dimensions aligning it. The activist side of her resonated with other women and men activists who advocated for change and worked with the government to do the same.

She advises women leaders to be comfortable in asking for help and support, as there is too much of an expectation for women to be 'superwomen'! Referencing to her gender dynamics at home, she believes that women leaders should learn to delegate at home as much as they do at work, as well as, and give men the space to contribute at home. When asked about 'men's rights', and how there have been debates about feminists keeping men out of the conversation, she highlighted that at the end of the day, human rights are universal. Women and men should be given equal opportunities, as humans. However, evidence suggests that women are denied many of the privileges that men get, positive action should be taken towards addressing the barriers that deny an equal base.

Yasmin is convinced that there is a need for workplaces which reflect the ethos of respect, dignity and equal opportunity. Practices and procedures that inhibit women need to be dealt with and backed with action. Women should have a safe space in filing complaints, with confidentiality. She also affirmed that we need more women leaders and role models. Women need to share their experiences with other women and inspire them. Regarding development opportunities, Yasmin believes that we need to be cognisant that people are different, and have diversity in thought and hence, we need more customised, focused leadership development. Lastly, she talks about the importance of reading, appreciative enquiry and the thirst to learn more.

**"**

*With each generation, women's ability to live the lives they choose reaches a place their grandmothers never thought possible. But that doesn't mean everything is perfect or that our work is finished.*
*-Cathy McMorris Rodgers*

**"**

# CONCLUSION

As a sector that is committed to reducing gender inequality, it is imperative that we walk the talk. Not only do we need to set up systems, policies and processes that promote gender equality at the workplace, we need to create ecosystems that enable the fair and effective implementation of these systems. Much work needs to be done to increase women's participation, and eventually, leadership in the development sector workforce, and we hope this report is a step, albeit a small one, in the right direction.

This report is being shared with the development community as an open source to help increase people's knowledge and enlighten them about the barriers that impede the establishment of a level playing field at the workplace for women, as well as policies and behaviours that can help remove those barriers.

We foresee this report to help initiate important dialogues around gender disparity and inspire action amongst women and men to promote gender equality at the workplace. We hope that women in development gain inspiration and guidance as they navigate through their work lives. We hope that men become cognisant of the challenges women face and take initiative in supporting equality at the workplace.

We hope organisations learn from the suggestions shared and adopt some or all of these, as appropriate, so as to make their organisations truly gender inclusive.

# NEXT STEPS

As next steps we will:

- Continue our dialogues on gender, inclusivity and women's leadership in the development sector ( Stay upto date here)

- Build a network of women leaders who can support each other

- Create a mentorship program for young women leaders

- Work on providing leadership capacity building support to mid-career women leaders

- Work on providing leadership capacity building support to women entering the workforce

- Work on providing leadership capacity building support to women leading grassroots organisations

- Continue in-depth research work on the subject of women's leadership in the development sector

If you are interested in learning more or contributing to this journey, please write to anchal@arthancareers.com

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Radhika works with the research and consulting teams at Arthan. She has done Economics from Delhi University and was a part of Enactus. She is extremely passionate about gender and education.

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In her most recent role, she served as the Executive Director at IWWAGE and has worked with organisations like Room to Read and ChildFund India in the past. She has close to 20 years of experience in the development sector.

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