

# WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2021

**WOMEN ON THE RISE:  
REDEFINING OUR COMMON FUTURE**

December 9, 2020



**WSDS 2021 Pre-event**

# Women on the Rise: Redefining Our Common Future

**Date:**

9 December 2020

**Time**

7:00–9:00 p.m. (IST)/ 8:30–10:30 a.m. (EST)

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# Agenda

7:00 – 7:35 p.m.	<b>Opening Session (35 minutes)</b> Gender-Inclusive Sustainable Development: Creating an Equal Opportunity Future
	<b>Welcome by Dr Annapurna Vancheswaran</b> , Senior Director, Communications Outreach and Advocacy Unit, TERI
	<b>Special Addresses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms Vaishali Nigam</b>, Founding Chair, ReNew Foundation; Chair, SAWIE</li><li>• <b>Dr Mukesh Aghi</b>, President and CEO, USISPF</li><li>• <b>Ms Ramona M El Hamzaoui</b>, Mission Director (Acting), USAID</li><li>• <b>Mr Daya Shankar</b>, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India</li></ul>
	<b>Address by Dr Ajay Mathur</b> , Director General, TERI
7:35 – 8:15 p.m.	<b>Panel 1: Inclusive Climate Priorities (40 minutes)</b>
	<i>Moderator:</i> <b>Ms Soma Dutta</b> , Former Programme Coordinator, ENERGIA Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms Shloka Nath</b>, Head – Sustainability and Special Projects, Tata Trusts /ICC</li><li>• <b>Ms Meagen Fallone</b>, Director and CEO, Barefoot College</li><li>• <b>Ms Anjali Garg</b>, Energy Specialist, IFC</li></ul>
8:15 – 8:55 p.m.	<b>Panel 2: Sustainability and New-age Women Leaders (40 minutes)</b>
	<i>Moderator:</i> <b>Ms Gauri Jauhar</b> , Executive Director, IHS Markit Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms Jill Evanko</b>, President and CEO, Chart Industries</li><li>• <b>Mr Mohandas Pai</b>, Chairman, Manipal Global</li><li>• <b>Dr Shalini Sarin</b>, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Elektromobilitat</li></ul>
8:55 – 9:00 p.m.	<b>Concluding Remarks (5 minutes)</b>
	• <b>Mr Nolty Theriot</b> , Senior Vice President, USISPF

The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Instituted in 2001, the Summit series has marked 20 years in its journey of making 'sustainable development' a globally shared goal.

Given the current global health crisis and its close inter-linkages with climate impact, the WSDS 2021 will be held under the umbrella theme of 'Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All'. Discussions through a series of virtual dialogues between June 2020 and February 2021 will focus on the current crisis and the road map that nations must adopt to tread the path of green recovery and sustainable development.

The first virtual dialogue was held on the eve of the World Environment Day – June 4, 2020. The occasion also marked the launch of a special initiative underlining the role of youth, 'Youth Unite for a Safe and Secure Environment for All'. The second in the series was hosted on the theme of 'energy transition' with a focus on the Indian power sector in collaboration with the Energy Transitions Commission (ETC) India on July 21, 2020. Reports on 'Renewable Power Pathways: Modelling the Integration of Wind and Solar in India by 2030' and 'Bending the Curve: 2025 Forecasts for Electricity Demand by Sector and State in the Light of the COVID Epidemic' were released during the event. The third dialogue was held in collaboration with the Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCC&I) in Kolkata titled, 'Driving Post COVID Growth through Resource Efficiency' on August 26, 2020. The fourth was a dialogue series held from December 1 to December 4, 2020 in partnership with the British High Commission that covered themes on Clean Transport in India, Green Finance, Nature-based Solutions, and Adaption and Resilience. This was followed by an event on 'Women on the Rise' in partnership with USAID on December 9, 2020, and the last virtual dialogue was on the theme – 'The Potential Role of Hydrogen in India' that was organized on December 16, 2020.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development brings the role of women into the mainstream of the development debate through its focus on leaving no one behind. Women have been contributing proactively in steering this development expedition, thereby promoting an increasingly inclusive and sustainable growth. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is beginning to complicate this narrative and the emerging challenges

are certainly slowing progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While it is imperative that we treat the current crisis as a wake-up call, it is crucial that global efforts are made to re-think, re-plan, and re-emerge with recovery plans that would not only strengthen our economies but also our health infrastructures, our business models, and most importantly, our climate actions.

Though climate change affects everyone, the vulnerability of women and children to its adverse effects has been increasingly recognized and attributed to numerous diverse and interacting factors, such as poverty, inequality, limited access to resources, lack of education and information. However, it is also widely recognized that women are not only passive sufferers of climate change but are also proactive agents of change, who can adapt differently than men by using their knowledge and prudent strategies. Multilateral regimes, particularly the SDGs and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), recognize that understanding the role and responsibilities of local communities especially women to climate change is critical to promote mechanisms for climate change-related planning. The last Conference of Parties (COP25) emphasized greater implementation and scaling up of gender-just climate solutions through the Gender Action Plan (GAP). While there is global consensus that women are integral to climate change and sustainable development, there is paucity of implementable frameworks and guidelines to address the concerns of women and girls that could ensure their greater participation in the climate change discourse. Therefore, it is essential that gender equality and empowerment of women are made necessary pre-conditions to facilitate harnessing of the potential of women to act as agents of change for achieving sustainable development for all.

In this regard, the virtual dialogue under the theme 'Women on the Rise: Redefining our Common Future' was hosted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), in partnership with South Asia Women in Energy (SAWIE) on December 9, 2020, with the objective of strengthening and promoting dialogue on the role of women in reviving the global economy while also addressing climate-related priorities for a sustainable future. The inaugural session was guided by special addresses from Vaishali Nigam Sinha, Founding Chair, ReNew Foundation and Chair, SAWIE; Ramona

M El Hamzaoui, Mission Director (Acting), USAID, India; Daya Shankar, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India; and concluded by Dr Ajay Mathur, Director General, TERI.

The keynote statements were followed by a panel discussion featuring – Shloka Nath, Head, Sustainability and Special Projects, Tata Trusts, and Executive Director, India Climate Collaborative (ICC); Meagen Fallone, Director and CEO, Barefoot College; and Anjali Garg, Energy Specialist, International Finance Corporation (IFC). The session was moderated by Soma Dutta, Former Programme Coordinator, ENERGIA. The next round of panel discussion comprised Jill Evanko, President and CEO, Chart Industries; Mohandas Pai, Chairman, Manipal Global; and Shalini Sarin, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Elektromobilitat and it was moderated by Gauri Jauhar, Executive Director, IHS Markit.

The pre-events were categorized into three sessions:

### **Opening Session**

This session set the context for the event by making arguments for gender-inclusive sustainable development with an aim to improve women's well-being and address gender gaps in the sustainability sector.

### **Panel 1: Inclusive Climate Priorities**

This session focused on the broader perspectives to address gender disparities in the distribution and control of resources, technologies, and services. It highlighted the importance of inclusive climate priorities and complementary efforts to promote gender equitable systems that allow both women and men to reap the benefits of investments by promoting greater and better-informed dialogues, policies, and practices.

#### ***Key questions for discussion***

1. What are the unpacked policy challenges and need assessments to achieve gender-inclusive climate priorities?
2. What kind of structural changes and institutional interventions can be undertaken to enhance entitlements of women at the individual and community level to achieve the larger goals of inclusive climate priorities?

3. What lessons can be learned from the successful gender-inclusive practices in ongoing climate priorities? What are the missed opportunities?

### **Panel 2: Sustainability and New-age Women Leaders**

This session foregrounded where we are on the map of sustainability and gender equality in 2020, and how women leaders are driving sustainable development and climate action globally and locally, and the opportunities to work across a wide range of areas and issues.

The panellists discussed the role and responsibilities of women as agents of change in bringing their perspectives and experiences into decision-making and implementation processes to achieve gender-inclusive outcomes.

#### ***Key questions for discussion***

1. What are the barriers towards realizing women's full participation in leadership roles? What new forms of leaderships are essential to unlock transformational changes?
2. What kind of platforms must be created to link diverse groups of practitioners and policymakers from different regions and sectors to promote women in leadership positions?
3. What more can be done to overcome gender blindness and address the persistent barriers to fulfil the promise of equality and sustainability?

## **Championing Women's Cause**

Welcoming the participants on behalf of TERI, USAID, and US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) and South Asia Women in Energy (SAWIE), **Dr Annapurna Vancheswaran** set the pace by familiarizing the gathering with the workings of WSDS 2021 through a brief presentation.

“Today's deliberations are part of the 20th edition of TERI's mega flagship event, the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS). This edition will be hosted virtually from the 10th to the 12th of February under the broad theme Redefining Our Common Future: Safe and Secure Environment for All. The discussions at the Summit will attempt to explore the close inter-

linkages that we see emerging between climate change and health. As we all know, women play a central role, particularly when we examine the socio-economic and health impacts of climate change risks. Hence, we have planned some dedicated sessions from now to the Summit. We are absolutely delighted that with the support of USAID, USISPF, and SAWIE, we have been able to put together this discussion leading to the Summit in February 2021,” said Dr Vancheswaran and signed off after thanking all the colleagues and participants.

Women are at the heart of energy transition but unfortunately, their experiences and voices do not necessarily get incorporated in the policy- and decision-making regime. **Ms Vaishali Sinha** drew everyone’s attention to the silver lining the pandemic has presented before us. “The scale and intensity of COVID-19 has been a setback but it has also shown us our abilities and what we can do even in these challenging circumstances. This calamity has perhaps reinforced the need for re-establishing a sustainable, resilient, and an inclusive socio-economic order. We have to recognize that women have taken the brunt of the pandemic and there’s so much more to be done as far as the agenda for women is concerned,” Ms Sinha asserted. About energy transition, she raised a pertinent point about the need for including women’s narratives in policymaking. “There is a lot to do with respect to ensuring that we engage women and include them in this whole transition which is unfolding before us. So, whether it is in rural India, or urban India, we can contribute extensively. It is great to see many women leaders as front runners. There are a lot of positive case studies, and as we march ahead, it is important that we do not lose sight of what we have achieved and where there are gaps that must be bridged,” Ms Sinha added. As far as academia is concerned, there are avenues that women can explore in the realms of industry academia partnership, research and development, and entrepreneurship. “Whether it is USISPF, SAWIE or TERI, women can become conduits to bring people’s ideas and opportunities together and ensure that they occupy the centre of things. We need to move towards a world where there is greater equity and it is extremely important for us to keep women engaged, so we can move ahead more inclusively,” concluded Ms Sinha.

Highlighting the role of USAID’s Asia EDGE initiative towards integration of women in the global economy and discussions of climate change-related

priorities to enable sustainability, **Ms Ramona M El Hamzaoui** foregrounded the need for gender equality and women empowerment.

“At USAID, we consistently highlight that gender equality and women empowerment are central to effective and sustainable development outcomes, and for societies to thrive, women and girls must have equitable and safe access to resources, such as education, healthcare, capital, energy, technology, land, market, and justice. They must also have equal rights and opportunities as business owners, peace builders, and leaders,” said Ms M El Hamzaoui. In its inspiring journey since 2018, USAID has been striving to strengthen opportunities for women to formally participate in all sectors and at all levels. This is a key mandate for USAID’s Asia EDGE initiative where EDGE stands for Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy. “Asia EDGE is an important component of furthering the US vision to improve energy access across South Asia and gender-inclusive development remains essential to realizing the gender goals,” explained Ms M El Hamzaoui. Despite the global progress on women’s rights and equality, M El Hamzaoui expressed concern over their underrepresentation in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. “The United Nations’ studies show that women held only 28% of global managerial positions in 2019, a statistic that has remained unchanged for nearly 25 years. Among Fortune’s 500 corporations, only 7% chief executive officers were women, and in the energy sector, this representation is even lower,” pointed Ms M El Hamzaoui. However, things are not all bleak. The same studies on the number of women CEOs in Fortune’s 500 companies highlight a few other things too. “They show that women CEOs drive thrice the return rates and that companies with a better diversity are 70% likelier to capture markets and they are 75% abler to foster innovative ideas. These are numbers we can all look at and to ignore these studies and their results would be to deny one half of the world’s population the opportunity to contribute to global progress. This will not only be a loss for the companies but for all of us too on a global scale,” cautioned Ms M El Hamzaoui.

SAWIE is going beyond the corporate boardrooms to highlight the issues across the energy supply chain from enhancing capacities of women in the distribution utilities to boosting access to clean energy at the grassroots level to improving health by reducing indoor

air pollution and alleviating poverty through increased income generation opportunities. “The role of women in today’s world is crucial and we are facing critical decisions on what our collective future should look like. Strengthening women’s participation in the workplace will bolster our progress towards reviving the global economy, especially as we recover from COVID-19 and address the priorities for a sustainable future,” said Ms M El Hamzaoui. Perspectives on gender-inclusive sustainable development to address gender gaps in the energy sector must be encouraged and acted upon. “An example of women’s roles that people may not realize is that the first coronavirus case to be found outside of China was in Thailand and it was discovered by a woman immunologist,” informed Ms M El Hamzaoui. Leaders from across the sectors must join to work towards the common goal of strengthening the shared commitment for gender equality. Their experiences are critical to women empowerment and achieving sustainable development across South Asia.

Expressing gratitude to Dr Ajay Mathur and Dr Mukesh Aghi for their continued partnership with USAID; Dr Daya Shankar, and Ms Vaishali Sinha from Renewpower, Ms M El Hamzaoui congratulated the team at TERI, SAWIE, and USISPF for their excellent teamwork and thanked Deloitte, the partner for Greening the Grid Rise, which is providing SAWIE with able technical support.

## Role of Government in Women Empowerment

The government’s efforts in promoting women empowerment and focusing on equal opportunities to ensure gender inclusivity in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic can be crucial in the path of sustainability. **Mr Daya Shankar** spoke about the necessity to perceive women as equal partners in a country’s economic growth and transformation of the social structure. Realizing this, “the focus of the government has now shifted from ‘Women Development’ to ‘Women-Led Development’. Women empowerment does not mean providing women with a few incentives or financial assistance but to create an ecosystem that would address the discrimination and challenges faced by them in their daily life. Unlike the general perception that equality

means making women equal to men, it actually means to provide women, just like men, equal opportunities in all spheres of life to realize their full potential,” said Mr Shankar. This involves a life cycle continuum approach that takes care of each and every aspect of a woman’s life, which includes ensuring prenatal care, post-natal care, early childhood care, elementary education, higher education including education in STEM, skill development, employment opportunities, safe and secure work environment, safe and secure environment at home and public places and support and care for the elderly, destitute, distressed, and marginalized women. Women are disproportionately affected by any natural disasters including those caused by climate change and extreme weather events. This is another aspect that needs special attention while formulating policies and technological advancements in relation to climate change. “Women must have freedom in decision-making both in the public and private spheres with the ability to influence the direction of social change gained through equal opportunity in the economic, social, and political spheres of life,” asserted Mr Shankar. The principles of gender equality are firmly enshrined in the Constitution of India, which also provides for affirmative action in favour of women and girls. The country also recognizes mainstreaming of gender-responsive approach in the provisions for infrastructure, public services, economic empowerment, and social protection. India is a signatory on a number of human conventions related to the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women, bridging platform for action and the endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing key challenges, such as poverty, inequality, climate change, violence against women, are critical for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

“India has consistently held the view that women are key agents for achieving transformational economic, environmental, and social changes that are required for sustainable development. Here, ‘transformational’ means the root cause of inequality must be addressed and not just its symptoms. The Government of India has taken several legislative and schematic interventions for promoting gender equality to enhance the opportunity for their empowerment. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry to deal with matters related to women and children. Through inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral convergence, the ministry

is working towards making a society where empowered women can live with dignity and contribute as equal partners in development in an environment free of violence and discrimination,” explained Mr Shankar. Make in India, Digital India, Swachh Bharat Mission, Smart City Programme, and Housing for All among others are some of the schemes the Indian government has launched to strengthen infrastructural development and industrial corridors that have the potential to generate employment opportunities for women. “In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India has taken immediate steps to provide relief to women and girls and ensure their welfare during a crisis. All the statutory officers under various legislations, such as the protection officers under the Domestic Violence Act, the dowry prevention officers, and child marriage prevention officers continue to work round the clock and take care of rehabilitation for aggrieved women,” assured Mr Shankar. Further, he added that all women helplines were operational and provided timely assistance to women affected by violence and those in distress. “The Government of India’s ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ (self-reliant India movement), with five pillars, namely, economy, infrastructure, system, demography, and demand was launched to cater to the communities of migrant labourers, street vendors, people belonging to poor and vulnerable sections, cottage industry, MSMEs, middle class, and the big industries as well. Such reforms across the sectors will drive the country to self-reliance and make India’s local products global,” said Mr Shankar. With the hope to create a gender-equal world, where women could become torchbearers of growth and success, Mr Shankar in his concluding remarks said, “I hope that these insightful discussions (held) today will lead to a focused outcome that will catalyse the concerted efforts by relevant stakeholders towards the common goal of a gender-equal society.”

## Women as Agents of Change

Gender inclusivity can be achieved only when women’s voices are made part of the mainstream socio-economic, political narrative. Reflecting on this thought, **Dr Ajay Mathur** highlighted that whether it is towards meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or more narrowly the climate goals, it is important to bring women to the centre of both the identification of issues and decision-making.

“At the end of the day, gender and its importance come out in the fact that the important issues of the day are handled by women as much as by men. Over the past many years, what we have learned whether it is in renewables or in energy-efficiency areas that I have been associated with is that we tend to leave out the big issues when we do not include the priorities and concerns of women in development. In the recent past, we have been active in the launch of the Ujjwala Programme, which is providing LPG gas for a lot of households, particularly rural households so that they do not burn biomass. This is recognition of the fact that for years, if not decades, we took it for granted that biomass use is how people like to make food that it tastes better. We conveniently forgot the number of women who suffer from a range of diseases, including cancer because of their exposure to the smoke from these chulahs (stoves). As we roll out the LPG programme, it is equally important that we address the issues related to getting the cylinders. If the cylinder is not available at the doorstep, it means that the man of the house, not the woman, goes out and gets the cylinder. The man will prioritize it as and when he wishes. It is important therefore that this is taken into account when we are making a decision,” pointed Dr Mathur. It is equally important that access to reliable gas supply is in place because as far as a woman is concerned, “if we run out of gas, the normal answer is well, we will go back to whatever we were using earlier which was fuelwood which was a lot of biomass which had the connotation of poor air quality. Having a second cylinder in the kitchen makes all the difference. It is important that we mainstream issues related to how people behave, how men behave, and how women behave in the decisions that we make,” added Dr Mathur. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to focus on inclusive climate priorities. Promoting gender-equitable systems that allow both men and women to reap the benefits of investments through better-informed dialogues, policies, and practices is the need of the hour. But this is one part of the picture. The second is, explained Dr Mathur, “we have also noticed that women are much more effective as agents of change than their male counterparts. This, I was surprised to learn, is not a new finding. When the Green Revolution was being launched in India, the agents of change were women, they passed on crucial information about the benefits of the revolution from one family to another, from one village to another. We also found this to be true in the promotion of renewable energy and when we were promoting the Lighting a

Billion Lives (LABL) programme. The vast number of women entrepreneurs in the solar energy area whom we trained were looking at opportunities through which they could provide services to the community and which did not involve their being away from home and household chores for a long period of time. It obviously has very strong implications as we look to the future.”

Dr Mathur talked about a future where solar pumps could become the mainstay of agriculture. “Recently in a programme that TERI launched in the state of Uttarakhand in Mukteshwar, we provided high quality plantation material herbs to local farmers. It’s the women who grow them, they dry them, and we buy it (the produce) back from them and then sell oregano or thyme or rosemary or so on. It provides the women with an income and it enables a higher quality of planting material to be provided,” said Dr Mathur, focusing on the role of women as the real ‘agents of change’. So, how can things flow into the decisions not only of the governments but also of corporates, NGOs, and families? “This is not an easy task. Many people point out to the fact that we have had a woman prime minister as a representation of the fact that gender equality has been pursued. I point out, she is the only prime minister, who has been a woman, we have not repeated that. It takes many people statistically for one to come to the top. We need a situation in which there are hundreds, thousands, millions of women both participating in the workforce as well as being agents of change,” signed off Dr Mathur with a thought-provoking statement.

## Building Back Better

When the focus of the government is to build and build back better, women, their livelihoods, energy access, and resilience assume more importance than ever. In this regard, the panel discussion on ‘Inclusive Climate Priorities’ was moderated by **Ms Soma Dutta**, comprising three leaders and agents of change from the climate change and energy sector.

In her introduction to the discussion, Ms Dutta said, “I think we are at the tipping point in managing our climate (or mismanaging for that matter) and some of the several opportunities that exist today in equalizing the scale are here. The first is, the way we are thinking of renewables is changing. There has been a proliferation of renewables as an economically attractive option in most countries. Going solar is becoming cheaper than

the traditional coal-powered plants. Costs are down like never before and this trend is likely to remain and among other things, this is going to provide a great opportunity for women as entrepreneurs, as sellers of these devices. Also, it gives an opportunity to use energy services for the multiple applications that you couldn’t even have thought of a decade ago. The second big trend is the mobilization of international climate finance even though I have to admit, it is way below what is required, but what is interesting is that many of these, in fact, most of these, whether it is the GCF (Green Climate Fund) or any other, are actually giving far greater attention to gender equality and trying to empower women through a climate change route.”

International institutions such as Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) are also committed to gender issues in a systematic way through direct interventions and accountability mechanisms. Another opportunity that Ms Dutta pointed out was that it is important for every country to submit their enhanced or revised NDCs, so that “the climate ambitions are rammed up and at the same time, we can expect and hope that there will be greater attention. There is definitely greater space for gender equality and gender-responsive approaches and these are not just as the traditional stand-alone gender action plans but in the climate sectors of energy, mitigation, adaptation, water, agriculture, transport, and urban resilience among others,” she added. Therefore, the role of women in reviving the global economy while also addressing climate priorities are essential considerations. In conclusion, Ms Dutta shared a positive thought and said, “The recovery from COVID-19 actually gives us a fresh chance to restart and do things differently. Women leaders and entrepreneurs in the renewables sector could actually be the change to bending back better.”

Climate change accelerates existing crises in India and exposes the underlying structural flaws and inequities. India is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, said **Mr Shloka Nath** and pointed out that the impacts climate change in our country “are going to range from increasing temperatures to crop failures to a higher incidence of natural disasters. These challenges are going to unfold through one-time shocks like the pandemic or slowly going to cascade and coincide with impacts like the widespread floods we saw in Bihar this year, the cyclone in Odisha, and so on. So, you have crises that are essentially interlocking and overlapping. And while climate change affects everyone, women’s



agency is limited in formulating socio-economic norms and that renders them even more vulnerable to the adverse outcomes of natural disasters,” said Mr Nath. There are challenges related to water, diseases, nutrition, mobility, employment, and natural resource management. “So, to give you an example, in the Beed district in Maharashtra, which is drought-stricken, many women migrate to perform back-breaking agricultural labour and since these women cannot afford to take leave around their menstrual cycles and have no access to toilets in the fields, several women in their early 20s have undergone hysterectomies. And the rate of uterus removal procedures is 14 times higher than the rest of the state in the country according to many civil rights organizations,” shared Mr Nath about one of the many heart-breaking stories on the unfolding crisis before us. But at this critical intersection of gender and climate, there is much that needs to be done and learned. “We have to gather our insights and ask the right questions and develop frameworks through which we can address the challenges women and girls face due to climate change and the role they can play in combating them. We are exploring a landscaping exercise with Dasra. We’re going to narrow the scope of the study and understand the key sub-sectors, such as the impact of climate change on sexual and reproductive health or how a warming world will contribute to migration issues for women and adolescent girls. So, through discussions, dissemination of information, interviews, and data collection, we are hoping to develop a foundational piece of work that can inform future research priorities and actions because there is increasing evidence on the broad challenges but there is very little information about these sub-sectors,” informed Mr Nath on how such a study is aimed at what should be collectively prioritized while thinking about the intersection of gender and climate. “We do have a moral, social, and economic imperative to act with urgency and direct the right policies, social protections, and strategies, so we can help women mitigate and adapt to and build resilience against climate change,” concluded Mr Nath.

## Climate Justice and Women Leadership

The climate movement is not going to succeed without an urgent upsurge in women’s leadership, asserted **Ms Megan Fallone**, who focused on how important it is for women, especially within the global south, to

lead in climate justice areas to address climate crisis by erasing systemic injustices. “There is extraordinary responsibility and opportunity that India has as a voice in leading within the global south. Yet far too often, those voices are underrepresented and efforts do not meet adequate support. And that doesn’t just mean money, it means a seat at the table and more than having a seat at the table, it is about being given the space to bring your voice as a woman, your perspective as a woman, your sensitivities, sensibilities, and insights. We need to recognize the wisdom and the leadership of girls and women within the spheres of the financial, scientific, academic, political, and activists’ community. In 2019, I was fortunate to be part of a unique group assembled by the Rockefeller Foundation at Bellagio in Italy, which brought together a group of women leaders from civil society, culture, media, philanthropy, business, and the government. That group under the leadership of Mary Robinson launched a declaration to advance a climate-just future with key actions and we actively and decisively as leaders pledged to use our positions of power and privilege and to use each other’s strengths and networks to support women and girls around the world to step forward and claim our space and leadership within the larger climate movement to lift women’s voices and their stories,” recounted Ms Fallone. All women must unify their efforts to create equity in health, education, economy, politics, peace, security and beyond the climate justice movement, because “climate and human rights are inseparable,” urged Ms Fallone as she talked briefly about her work at Barefoot College in the last decade towards creating new economic models with the private sector that “pays people and planet in greater balance” while upholding the idea of justice. “Holding the hands of women and seeing them in the global south, in poor rural communities now across nearly a hundred countries, they are our front line in the face of climate change and indeed the only effective means to breaking intergenerational poverty that is so often grounded in energy poverty. Women can be both community activists and caregivers; they are farmers, fisherfolk, craftspeople, and they are sustaining their livelihoods and societies, their children’s future, and their own cultural paths and identities that have been eroded by the effects of climate change. So, how long will they be able to hold that line without us listening to their voices?” signed off Ms Fallone with a powerful prompt to ponder over not only how women are going to contribute more but also how their voices could be brought forth the table.

Talking about mainstreaming gender in activities alone cannot reap results, the core issue is to recognize and internalize that the approach towards gender and energy is made business-oriented, shared **Ms Anjali Garg** while advocating the need to bring the marginalized to the centre.

“It would be good to do and good to show activity within a project, otherwise it will always continue to be on the periphery. It will remain on the pilot stage and will continue to prepare case studies. So, you have to really break that barrier and that can only happen when you truly believe in it and there is a problem of market failure that you’re trying to provide a solution by mainstreaming gender. That is exactly where our experience comes in play with ‘In Lighting Asia’. In this programme, we encouraged women to become entrepreneurs and helped them solve clients’ issues of not having a good quality solar product. But the challenge that we were trying to address was of last mile availability of the product, last mile availability of after sales service agents, and entrepreneurs selling the product. We did not build this whole channel just because we wanted to but we first identified the issue and you know women in the villages and in rural areas provide that last mile connectivity and they are best placed to provide a solution to this issue in rural markets,” explained Ms Garg.

After partnering with like-minded companies who believed in her business model, Ms Garg and her team developed holistic solutions. “The message is that piecemeal does not really work. If you are structuring a solution, it has to be holistic, right from helping them identify the right entrepreneurs, the right partnerships, train them and then give them the right support to scale up the business and then let it scale up, so you do not have to be present throughout the process but you have to prove that this makes for a good business case, that is only when financing will flow and all other partners will join. In fact, it is heartening to see that during COVID-19, some of these companies were the worst hit to begin with and then the lockdown was enforced, but they responded quickly and have ultimately played such a critical role in ensuring that women entrepreneurs on the ground are there to make sure that the supply of products is not disrupted and these are sometimes essential products,” informed Ms Garg, who had started a handwash campaign and invested in a venture that made business sense where women entrepreneurs could lead from the front.

## New-age Women Leaders

The second panel discussion on *Sustainability and New-age Women Leaders* was moderated by **Ms Gauri Jauhar**. Highlighting the key takeaways from the previous sessions, Ms Jauhar pointed out it’s time to break away from the mould and approach diversity and inclusion through real, new, and innovative solutions to existing biases in society.

“India’s energy transition needs to be inclusive and diverse. Dr Mathur talked about women as agents of change and focused on the Ujjwala scheme and I think what we don’t realize is that a scheme like Ujjwala has given, for instance, four hours in a day back to women to do other things, possibly to gain education. Vaishali (Sinha) talked about women having borne the brunt of the pandemic and Ramona shared that though women make up about 50% of the world’s working age population, they’re still underrepresented, especially in key decision-making roles of the workforce as there are leakages in the workforce as the funnel narrows on the top of the house. Diversity is good for business and gender-diverse companies actually offer higher returns with possibly lower volatility. So, the case of good and inclusive business is strong and another study which comes to my mind is that McKinsey estimates that women, if working at their full potential, could add up to about 28 trillion dollars to the annual global GDP by 2025. Reviving the global economy in a post-pandemic world is certainly something which we are here to work on as inclusive organizations and leaders,” said Ms Jauhar and welcomed the panellists to the discussion on espousing the cause of gender diversity and inclusion in today’s age.

As the world responds to the global pandemic, it also opens up the opportunity to have a candid conversation about women’s role in reviving the economy. **Ms Jill Evanko** discussed how women can play a greater part in the climate change discourse in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). “I think of this in two parts. First, what can we do as companies around the globe to support progress and second, what can we as individuals regardless of gender do to help ourselves and each other in this undertaking? First, at Chart, a global industrial manufacturing company, we are proud to have 900 team members in Southeast Asia, 140 of which are women. We do manufacture in India and have its Finance and Engineering roles in Hyderabad. But this

number is to give you a sense and is far greater than only a few years ago. Sustainability is growing as a career and women hold a majority of Sustainability Executive roles in large companies. And I think that is really because as women, we share a passion for change and a desire to make people's lives better through their businesses. At Chart, we have many upcoming engineers who are women and we have tried to create space for diverse and perhaps less traditional roles and that is important for companies to do. By creating the space, we also create the ability to demonstrate how successful women can be in leadership roles. Let me share an example from our own business. There was a preconceived cultural view in one of our largest Southeast Asian manufacturing facilities that a woman could not or perhaps should not run a business, earlier this year in April. So right at the beginning of the global pandemic, we decided we would promote a very high-performing woman to run one of our largest sites. And she has led the team to a much more positive and an open-minded atmosphere. Now, other women in the business have stepped forward to take on new opportunities including one entering our executive leadership programme as the Head of Finance and another as the Head of HR in the same facility," said Ms Evanko as she shared an inspiring story on how an all-women all-star team in a company was born. Taking a leaf from Megan's (Fallone) talk, Ms Evanko said that women are clear with what is needed and "this is a very important attribute as a leader of an organization to know where to prioritize and get everybody onto the same page. So now stepping back to the second piece – the personal side. What can each of you do to help? When we hire, we look for the most capable person for the job regardless of gender. In many cases, the most capable brings a different perspective to well-established industries, and this is where I see the opportunities for women to make a significant difference. In order to do this though, we need to remove those preconceived notions or perspectives on how culture will respond to women in leadership roles. As a leader in a mostly male-dominated industry, nearly all of my colleagues who are men are actually eager to hear another viewpoint and have respect for what I bring to various discussions. But sometimes, it requires you as a woman to take the first step in reaching out to your male colleagues," she added and urged women to know that they can be both mothers and company executives. "It is not mutually exclusive. I have a seven-year-old myself. So that leads me to my commentary about confidence. How do we

foster confidence in women making a difference in this discourse? Some of the examples I already gave support exactly that and today's discussion is another great example; so, thanks to TERI, SAWIE, and USISPF for generating this critical dialogue and I think we need to do that more. Climate change is a global issue and I don't think it should be solved on a country-by-country basis. It is important that we do this globally and as an American company with locations around the world, we want to be involved in these conversations and progress not in a particular region but as a global initiative. Sustainable Development Goals are simply referred to within the realms of climate change or energy, when in reality, they touch water scarcity, clean water, and even clean food, all of which are interlinked just like the discussion on women in leadership is interlinked with solving these critical global challenges," concluded Ms Evanko.

**Mr Mohandas Pai** expounded on the data available on the participation of women in the sectors of education and employment.

"I think we should have a report on the state of women in India so all of us are on the same page. In schools, there are more girls than boys today as per the latest data. In colleges, more women joined than men last year. And three years from now, we will have more women graduating than men in terms of the gross enrolment rate. In many states, there are more women graduates than men already," shared Mr Pai as he analysed the participation of women in the workforce. In north India, we are getting a lot of women graduates but there are no jobs. That is why, the participation of women in the workforce has come down. In south India, however, there are many jobs and I think women are participating in an extremely big way. If you look at the corporate sector, women make up 17% of India's board members. They make up 10 of Indian CEOs. In the IT industry, 40% of the incoming batch is women. When you go to the middle layer, about 30% are women. If you go to the top layer, the C-suite and two levels below, there are 10% women already. At Infosys, we had a problem. When I was there about 11 years ago as Director for HR, we found that only 55% of women came back after they had a child, so we put in place some interesting policies. What we said is when you have a baby, we are going to assign you a mentor so you can understand when to return. This helped them regain confidence too. Second, we gave women up to two years' leave without pay and some leave with pay for maybe four or three months

so that they could keep their job. Third, we created a work from home or work from other offices for such women. Within two years, women coming back went up to 85%,” recounted Mr Pai, who argued that women require special facilities to return. “We must create a technology platform and events where opinion-makers, regulators, and others come together to understand issues about women and take serious policy decisions. To give an example, the Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) came out with the norm that every board should have at least one woman. We asked for independent board members but very soon, we found that most of the women were family members. Then we went back to them and told them we want an independent woman member and they agreed. The law has been changed now and we have 17% women members in the board and it is working remarkably well. Now, if you look at senior members in the IT industry, the boards have more women.

They are coming back to hold senior positions and now, many tech companies are starting a move to get back women to the workforce after they have left and gone through childbearing, and raised their children,” added Mr Pai, who seemed hopeful looking at the trends in the technology and start-up industry where many women are performing remarkably well. “They do a very good job. They are extremely focused and highly talented and now special programmes have started to train women in new technologies. So, we must create a platform where regulators, government, and other stakeholders can come together and discuss issues and come up with legislative changes to uplift marginalized women in a male-dominated society,” said Mr Pai, who urged everyone to focus on diversity, inclusion, and celebrate the success of women. “For example, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, India’s greatest human entrepreneur, she is all over the place, she is talking in public, she is

on TV, she is everywhere. We need to showcase women. She has taken the lead in making sure she creates a woman forum in technology and that is working well. So, showcasing women as heroes in society, and I am using hero as a neutral term in society, having a ‘State of the Women in India’ report every single year are important. Today, in our office, we have may be 50 women and they do a remarkable job. You just have to give them the space, encourage them, mentor them, and they will do extremely well,” shared Mr Pai in his concluding remarks.

Closing the invigorating session, **Nolty Theriot** congratulated and thanked all the panellists and participants on behalf of the USISPF, and expressed gratitude to the partners at TERI, SAWIE, and USAID for organizing the event in such trying times. “We stand committed to promoting gender inclusion and sustainable development, and look forward to supporting TERI’s World Sustainable Development Summit,” signed off Theriot.

## Conclusion and the Way Forward

The WSDS has and will always continue to associate closely with leading women practitioners from across sectors in the capacities of speakers, lead discussants, participants, youth leaders, and media representatives, through its multifarious activities and engagements. The pre-event discussions aim to feed into the special thematic track that will be held at the WSDS in February 2021. The final discussion as part of the virtual dialogue series will culminate in the form of a high-level plenary session at the WSDS focusing on the theme, ‘Women Leadership for a Sustainable Future’, which will address the need for a global policy framework for women’s development and empowerment.



## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ We at USAID strongly believe that gender equality and women’s empowerment are central to effective and sustainable development outcomes. For societies to thrive, women and girls must have equitable and safe access to resources such as education, health care, capital, energy,..... also have equal rights and opportunities as business owners, peacebuilders, and leaders. ”

**Ramona M El Hamzaoui,**  
Mission Director (Acting), USAID/India



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## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ The climate movement will not succeed until we see an upsurge in women leadership, most importantly from the Global South. India has the responsibility and opportunity of leading the voice from Global South. ”

**Ms Meagen Fallone,**  
Director & CEO, Barefoot College



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## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ We miss the safety and security aspect for women. A lot needs to be done in terms of basic infrastructure and transport if we want to see the needle move. ”

**Dr. Shalini Sarin,**  
Co-Founder & Executive Director Elektromobilitat



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## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ India has a unique opportunity to set a global precedent if we can choose a greener path and have inclusive approach. We as developers, policymakers, donors, funders can make it happen. ”

Ms Anjali Garg,  
Energy Specialist, IFC



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## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ At Chart, we have 900 team members in Southeast Asia and 140 of these are women. We have many upcoming female engineers and we try to create space for diverse and less traditional roles. At an individual level, we need to remove pre-conceived notions and perspectives on how a culture responds to women in leadership roles. ”

Ms Jill Evanko,  
President & CEO, Chart Industries



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## WOMEN ON THE RISE

“ This will be the decade of the Indian women. India will become more compassionate, better society with more women in leadership. ”

Mr Mohandas Pai,  
Chairman, Manipal Global



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