

Event Report

“South Asia Women in Energy (SAWIE) Leadership Summit”

A. Details of the Event

Organised by: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) & US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF)

Date and Time: 6th April, 2021, 5:45 pm to 9:00 pm (IST)

B. Objective

USISPF in partnership with USAID launched the platform South Asia Women in Energy (SAWIE) in September 2019, for leaders in the energy, manufacturing and industrial sectors, to come together and deliberate the importance of gender diversity in decision making & leadership roles.

The first SAWIE Annual Leadership Summit has been organised with the aim of bringing together senior Indian Government officials, US Government officials, business leaders and experts from India, U.S. and South Asia to discuss the role of gender in advancing climate mitigation and environmental sustainability efforts.

C. Details of Sessions

Opening Remarks and Keynote Address

Keynote Address - Gender Equality as the way forward for India’s Ambitious Climate Mitigation Roadmap

Speaker: John Kerry, U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, US Government

Key Discussion Points

- Women’s representation in leadership roles is crucial for addressing the climate crisis as they are disproportionately affected by climate disasters. Thus, maintaining the gender balance is a prerequisite for effective policy impacts, and building a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive future.
- India is currently undergoing a remarkable transition and at this juncture decisive action from India towards sustainability and inclusivity, in partnership with the rest of the world will determine what this transformation will mean for future generations.
- When it comes to climate action, India is a major player on a global stage, with its leadership of the International Solar Alliance, announcement of a National

Hydrogen Mission and ambitious targets for energy integration. If India more aggressive in its approach towards a clean energy transition it has the potential to create half a million additional jobs by 2050, as forecasted by the International Energy Agency. India also has the advantage of having support from the US during this development phase.

- Along with Government initiatives, financing will play a crucial role in climate mitigation in the future. Massive transformation is happening in the private sector through sustainable financing. Further, post-Covid, such investments in clean energy transition are set to increase manifold and India is going to be a hotbed for them.
- The need of the hour is to create a galvanised world for a global clean energy transition and integration of women in these efforts will help in the mission of ‘Building Back Better’.

Opening Remarks – Mainstreaming women as agents of change for climate mitigation

Speakers:

Mukesh Aghi, President and CEO, USISPF

Vaishali Sinha, Chair, ReNew Foundation; Chair SAWIE

Ramona M El Hamzaoui, Acting Mission Director, USAID

Raj Shah, President, The Rockefeller Foundation

Key Discussion Points

- Though climate change is a grave accelerating threat for the entire human population, studies suggest that women are more likely to be affected by climate change as compared to their male counterparts. Globally 80% of the people displaced by climate change are women. Their role as primary caregivers and providers of food and fuel tend to make them more vulnerable during climate disasters.
- The numbers are dismal when it comes to female labour force participation as well, especially in the male dominated energy sector. Globally, only 32% of the workforce engaged in jobs linked to renewable energy is female. The Covid-19 pandemic has further reduced this number by disproportionately impacting women and their work.
- However, studies have showcased that prioritising women in the labour force as well as in leadership roles leads to improved productivity, enhanced talent pool or talent acquisition, better workplace dynamics and higher competitive advantage for firms.
- Thus, the need of the hour is to put gender equity at the centre of business priorities and provide women with opportunities and an enabling environment to grow and thrive. This will allow them to be frontrunners in the race against climate change.

- In the modern economy, energy unlocks potential - especially for young girls and women and provides them with better prospects for education and livelihoods, which in turn benefits the local economy. Reliable energy is needed to bridge the gender gap, especially in rural India, and this can be achieved by focussing on scaling up renewable energy.
- USAID is committed to the cause of women empowerment, especially in the energy sector and is currently operating a list of programmes and platforms to this end. SAWIE, one such initiative of USAID, in partnership with USISPF, is in effort to bring to light the poor female participation in the energy sector, especially in developing countries and devising interventions for the same through strategic dialogues.

Fireside Chat – Promoting Diversity in Leadership Roles for Building a Sustainable Future

Speakers:

Nandita Bakhshi, President and CEO, Bank of the West; Co-Chief Executive Officer, BNP Paribas USA Inc.

In conversation with

Nivedita Mehra, Managing Director – India, USISPF

Key Discussion Points

- Authenticity is at the core of diversity and inclusivity. This can be integrated into the core policies and ideals of any organisation and can be used to ensure increased diversity across its board, management and team
- Technology and communication are the way forward for ensuring women empowerment and inclusivity in the workforce. This is been brought to the fore by the pandemic and is here to stay. Women can leverage technology as an opportunity for their growth and development
- Along with technology, climate-linked sustainable finance is also going to be a strategic move for climate action.

Panel 1: Balance for Better: More Women Leaders in Boardrooms

Objective

The objective of this session was to discuss the importance of gender-equal leadership. It aimed at deliberating as to how the current leaders can take bold action to develop the pipeline of female talent, accelerate the progression of women and tackle biases in their

organisations, so that there's representation of women at decision making positions across energy ecosystem.

Panelists:

Shalini Sarin, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Elektromobilitat; Co-Chair SAWIE (Moderator)

Neelam Dhawan, Board Member, ICICI Bank

Vidya Ramnath, President, Middle East & Africa, Emerson Automation Solutions, Emerson Kishore Jayaraman, President, Rolls-Royce, India & South Asia

Shrikant Bapat - Country General Manager & Managing Director India, Johnson Controls

Key Discussions Points:

- **Context Setting:** There have been long-standing attempts to foster women in roles of leadership within organisations, particularly in spheres of corporate and businesses. While statistics reveal stark ground realities when it comes to gender-inclusivity, there is a pressing need to ensure that these numbers change for the better. For instance, just the sheer fact that 80% of all people displaced by climate change are women, or the fact that women and children are 14 times more likely to be affected by climate disasters, points towards something deeply worrying and engrained in the social setting.
- **Gender-inclusive vs Women-focused Outlook:** One major caution that needs to be exercised while framing policy guidelines or gender visions in any organisation, is of the thin line between focusing on only women as against a gender-neutral and inclusive outlook. A case in point would be increasing maternity leave through relaxing relevant policies which implies that the organisation believes that taking care of children is a women's job. While this is a narrowed stance, a gender-inclusive stance would be introducing concepts of paternity leave, which states that the organisation's stance is gender-inclusive, rather than only women-focused.
- **Sectoral Insights:** Even though there have been relatively better representation of women in boardrooms of public and private sector banks in India, this number is still miniscule as compared to the demographic proportions of women in the society as well as women's contribution in the economy. There are various reasons and learning from this paradigm.

First, because of the fact that women have higher financial credibility and conscious nature of paying back loans timely, there was a need felt by the banking sector to have women across various managerial and leadership roles. This need can be attributed to the business case of the sector understanding the behaviour of their client. Secondly, an enabling environment that allowed natural progression has enabled, in many cases, women rising up to leadership roles and boardrooms in sectors like banking. However, challenges still persist in sectors like technology, manufacturing, energy companies, amongst others.

- **Nature of Jobs:** Another layer of complexity, which often results in gender-exclusive performance of many companies, is the nature of roles that are perceived unfit for women. The general observation that one may find various women in roles like CHRO (Chief Human Resource Officer), Marketing Heads, Advertisement Heads and Finance Departments, there are still far less women in roles like the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) or Heads in Technology or Business Development Verticals. Furthermore, there is a deeper cause of this perception that is rooted in the societal rubric, which needs careful scrutiny and redressal.
- **Perception and Process-oriented Solutions:** In order to address such complicated issues related to gender-inclusivity, there is a need to rethink the way talent hiring and promotions work in any organisation. Ideal practices have shown in many cases that a level-playing field for hiring people in the first line of managers, coupled with an enabling ecosystem promoting unbiased work culture and capability-based promotions and increments can yield in tangible outcomes in terms of women's roles in leadership positions within firms.
- **Continuous Obstacles:** The challenge of ensuring gender-inclusivity in firms is not a static one. For instance, even though if hiring processes are made gender-inclusive, there will be another layer of disparity in the near future owing to exclusionary and biased imperatives of promotions and increments.

Additionally, there are several persistent challenges that need to be acknowledged and addressed. Firstly, the manifestations of perception challenges, which results in women that are in leadership roles being assigned tasks that are perceived to be less important. There have been credible evidences that have shown that the main barrier obstructing women from aggressively pursuing for leadership roles is the consideration of out-of-home situations. Therefore if, for instance, a leadership role requires ample travels, then most women are hesitant to take it up as they might not be comfortable with the out-of-home conditions. Finally, there is also a need to acknowledge the 'incompetence syndrome' that many women face in firms.

- **Way Forward:** An enabling environment which explicitly acknowledges gender-diversity and gender-inclusivity as its guiding principle, along with adopting processes that are fair and capability-based can do wonders for promoting the cause of more women in leadership roles. For doing so, there needs to be concerted efforts for enhancing the exposure of women in networking and communications, along with adopting strategies like aspirational role models and integration of existing efforts by industry associations.

Panel 2: Gender Equality for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

Purpose

The session discussed the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development and women's experience in sustainable development.

Key Note Speakers:

Jill Evanko, President and CEO, Chart Industries

Monali Zeya Hazra, Clean Energy Specialist, Indo Pacific Office, USAID/India

Panelists

Atul Arya, Senior Vice President and Chief Energy Strategist at IHS Markit (Moderator)

Vaishali Sinha, Chair, ReNew Foundation; Chair SAWIE

Shloka Nath, Head – Sustainability & Special Projects, Tata Trusts

Mechthild Worsdefer, Director-Sustainability, IEA

Key Discussions Points:

- The least number of women are working in sustainability and energy sector industries due to lack of opportunities and awareness. In the current sustainability industry scenario least number of women have been promoted to top level roles. Even though women have clear concepts and innovative solutions to mitigate climate change issues, organisational structures are barriers for them to implement their ideas. Policy and regulation required to encourage more women to participate in top level roles and also implement their innovative solutions.
- Though Sustainability and climate change awareness has reached the majority of the population, it's very less among women due to lack of accessibility. Women in rural areas do crucial work indirectly in the sustainability field without awareness. To create awareness among women in sustainability and energy sector schemes, events and programmes should be organized.
- Regional and International level platforms are required to share knowledge and technology among women entrepreneurs for identifying opportunities, schemes and benefits. They help women entrepreneurs to start their business in the sustainability sector without any economic and technological barriers. These platforms also help in developing employment opportunities for women.
- Women are among those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of unsustainable practices and climate change, because they often have no independent income and rights. Financial and mentorship support is crucial for young women entrepreneurs to do business and a regional ecosystem is required to bring more women in climate action.
- Government and non-governmental organisations should promote pilot projects in the sustainability field for women-based organisations which will provide opportunities to improve women's role in sustainability sectors. Such pilot projects will create huge employment opportunities for women in the sustainability sectors and nurture women's skills.
- Women entrepreneurs who are engaged in businesses based on natural resources and agricultural sectors are affected due to unequal pay and climate change in

rural areas. Hence, women are the most convincing advocates for climate-based solutions. So they should be at the forefront of decision-making on sustainable development and climate-change mitigation.

D. Highlights

The session was well-moderated and the composition was also gender-inclusive, in line with the objectives of the discussion.

E. Lowlights

Limited interaction with participants and no focus on answering queries or responding to comments from the audiences.