



Women in India Inc. Summit

Event Report

22 February 2024

Godrej One, Vikhroli, Mumbai

Women in India Inc. Summit

Introduction

The Udaiti Foundation, in collaboration with the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis (CEDA), Godrej DEI Lab, Dasra, and CNBC-TV18 organised the Women in India Inc Summit on February 22, 2024, at Godrej One in Vikhroli, Mumbai. The summit aimed to foster a profound discussion on crucial aspects of corporate strategies, with a specific focus on hiring and retaining women talent, as well as aligning workplaces with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals.

Highlights



1

**Report Launch: From Intent to Practice:
Fostering Gender-Inclusive Workplaces**
Insights from the Report

Dr Kanika Mahajan, Associate Professor of Economics at Ashoka University and **Roshni Mukherji**, Senior Program Manager at The Udaiti Foundation,

2

**Unlocking Insights: A Dialogue on Hiring
Manager Practices and Perspectives**
Closed Door Roundtable

30 leaders, including CHROs, CXOs, and business luminaries

3

**Welcome Remarks, Introduction
and Presentation**

Nisaba Godrej, Executive Chairperson, Godrej Consumer Products, **Ashish Dhawan**, Founder and CEO, The Convergence Foundation, **Dr Ashwini Deshpande**, Professor of Economics, Ashoka University

4

**Leading the Shift: Transitioning to
Gender-Inclusive Workplaces**
Panel Discussion

Manisha Girotra, CEO, Moelis India, **Prabha Narasimhan**, MD and CEO, Colgate-Palmolive, **Shyamala Gopinath**, Former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India, **Sunita Cherian**, Chief Culture Officer & Senior VP, HR, Wipro, Moderated by **Shereen Bhan**, Managing Editor, CNBC TV-18

5

Launch of the Circle of Champions

Shereen Bhan, Managing Editor, CNBC TV-18 and **Pooja Sharma Goyal**, CEO, The Udaiti Foundation

Unlocking Insights: A Dialogue on Hiring Manager Practices and Perspectives

Closed Door Roundtable

At the Women in India Inc. Summit, a **closed-door roundtable** brought together a small group of **30 leaders**, including CHROs, CXOs, and business luminaries. **The Udaiti Foundation** and the **Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, Ashoka University**, **jointly released their report**, 'From Intent to Practice: Fostering Gender-Inclusive Workplaces,' offering an examination of factors shaping women's employment in India from an employer's perspective. The two-hour session delved into the report findings, by applying these insights to foster workspaces aligned with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals.



Presentation by Dr Ashwini Deshpande,

Professor of Economics & Founding Director, Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, Ashoka University

Ashwini presented CEDA's research findings on advancing women's participation in the Indian workforce. She emphasised the concerning statistic that the **female labour force participation rate** (LFPR) in India stands at only one-third, significantly lower than the global average. She elaborated on the causes contributing to this disparity, encompassing both supply and **demand-side factors**. Highlighting the importance of data analysis and advocacy, she proposed these as essential components of the solution to address the gender imbalance in India's workforce.



Report Launch: From Intent to Practice: Fostering Gender-Inclusive Workplaces

Insights from the Report

Dr Kanika Mahajan, Associate Professor of Economics at Ashoka University, and **Roshni Mukherji**, Senior Program Manager at The Udaiti Foundation, presented insights from the report, '**From Intent to Practice: Fostering Gender-Inclusive Workplaces**', co-authored by The Udaiti Foundation and the Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, Ashoka University, which underscores the pivotal role of employers, particularly in the private corporate sector, who have the potential to significantly influence women's labour force participation rates by fostering gender-inclusive workplaces.

KEY FINDINGS

1. 73% of hiring managers reported that their organisations had set gender diversity goals but only 21% reported having internal corporate strategies in place to implement these goals.
2. 59% of the survey respondents said that their organisations had not set up **Internal Complaints Committees** that are mandated by the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, indicating a substantial gap in addressing sexual harassment concerns impacting women.
3. Findings showed that all candidates with **career breaks**, irrespective of gender, faced reduced chances of being selected. The respondents (hiring managers) were 24 percentage points less likely to shortlist female candidates with a career break when they had the same academic, professional, and personal background as male candidates.
4. 34% of hiring managers highlighted that women during their exit interviews expressed concerns about balancing work with household and caregiving duties. In contrast, only 4% of hiring managers reported similar concerns among men.

Unlocking Insights: A Dialogue on Hiring Manager Practices and Perspectives

Key Insights: Closed Door Roundtable

Bridging Intent to Practice

1. **Priti Kataria, Senior Vice President and CHRO, Wipro Enterprise Futuring**, shared Wipro's DEI journey, stressing the importance of specific employee life cycle programs, since within the IT sector, while at the hiring stage, there has been an improvement, the advancement of women from mid-management to leadership roles requires more attention. She also highlighted how publicly declaring gender agendas reassures talent internally and externally, further building the pipeline and retention of employees.
2. **Shailja Mehta, Director, Dasra**, emphasized the role of training, infrastructure, and the setup in facilitating work for any gender. She advocated for a practical approach, suggesting a focus on both interim and longer-term solutions. Shailja highlighted the need for various solutions, including current ones, infrastructural improvements, and policy changes.
3. **Tanya Mehan, Director of People & Culture at GoYubi**, stressed the importance of addressing biases and cultural corrections, and how GoYubi is utilising Neuro Linguistic Programming to counter biases. These innovative solutions bridge the gap between intent and practice.

Flexibility and Inclusivity

1. **Zoya, Diversity and Inclusion Lead at Godrej Properties Limited**, explained their focus on location flexibility and outlined the challenges of implementing flexibility in the real estate sector, which is primarily on-site. The emphasis was on retaining mid-management and management-level female employees through work-life balance programs.
2. **Priti, Wipro**, highlighted the evolution into a hybrid work model and acknowledged the gendered impact of COVID-19, noting that women globally took more breaks.



Gender-Inclusivity in Male-Dominated Sectors

1. **Suraj Saharan, Co-founder, and COO of Delhivery**, shared the logistics industry's journey towards gender inclusivity, since it is a traditionally male-dominated sector. Through Delhivery's DEI programs and initiatives, a department at one of their warehouses now has over 80% women representation. Suraj also brought to attention the value that women bring to their operations: they consistently report better productivity and higher attendance: 46% of women employees have perfect attendance as compared to 39% of men.
2. Recounting successful women-run operations, **Anamika Wani, Learning and Development Manager, Blue Dart**, shared Bluedart's women-run service centre based in new Mumbai, instituted 5 years ago. Echoing Suraj's insights, the metrics and service quality are far superior in this women-run centre than in any of their other service centres, making the case that women even at the frontline can make a noticeable difference, and for other managers to start adding more women into the workforce.
3. On the supply side of employment, **Raunika Malhotra, President of Corporate Band and Communication, Lodha Group**, shared the firm's initiative of setting up an all-women team that is going to construct a building, currently in the phase of coaching and training the all-women team. Surprisingly, most of the coaching has been for family members, and not women, since that is where the resistance comes from.



Reskilling and Rejoining: The Road to Returnship Success

1. **Neha Bagaria, Founder and CEO of HerKey**, addressed challenges related to career breaks and interventions to reintegrate women into the workforce. She highlighted the 4 Ms (marriage, motherhood, mobility, and medical care) as reasons for women taking career breaks and emphasized the need for concentrated returnship programs to bridge skill gaps and boost confidence.
2. **Tanya, GoYubi**, highlighted their returnship program, "Back 2 Epic," designed to upskill returning women and provide a paid returnship.

Leadership and Inclusivity

1. **Sakshi Handa, Senior VP at Mahindra & Mahindra, and Raunika, Lodha Group**, emphasized the need to support women at every stage of the employee life cycle, and the crucial role of coaching and training in motivating women to join the workforce.
2. **Priti, Wipro**, shared Wipro's board's active involvement in the DEI agenda of the firm, and encouraged leadership diversity without imposing constraints, emphasizing that most initiatives are led by business leaders rather than HR, echoed by the roundtable attendees.

Beyond Gender-Inclusive Initiatives

1. **Alapinee Deshmukh, HR Lead (Emp Engagement, HR Tech, DEI, CSR and Wellness), eClinicalWorks and Parneet Soni, Head HR - Retail Finance, Piramal Capital & Housing Finance**, encouraged collaboration rather than competition. They discussed moving from Return on Investment (ROI) to Return on Value (ROV) and adopting initiatives for women's holistic well-being.
2. **Shailja, Dasra**, further emphasised collaboration to collectively achieve the overarching goal of gender inclusivity.

The roundtable underscored the imperative of developing clear action plans, fostering leadership commitment, tailoring solutions to industry-specific challenges, and adopting holistic frameworks to advance gender inclusivity effectively in workplaces.



Leading the Shift: Transitioning to Gender- Inclusive Workplaces

Panel Discussion

Nisaba Godrej, Executive Chairperson of Godrej Consumer Products

Nisaba began by emphasizing Godrej's success in attaining gender parity, with 50% women representation on the board, aligning with industry standards. She pointed out that while organizations may set goals, there is a discernible absence of actionable measures to create truly gender-inclusive workplaces, indicating that there is still a considerable journey ahead. Nevertheless, she acknowledged the growing intent within organizations to drive meaningful change.



Ashish Dhawan, Founder and CEO of The Convergence Foundation

Ashish emphasised the value of data-backed evidence, meaningful collaborations and scalable solutions. He issued **three powerful calls to action** to the audience, one, to join the Close the Gender Gap's Beta Program, two, to collaborate on a pilot or case study, and three, to join the Circle of Champions.



Dr Ashwini Deshpande, Professor of Economics & Founding Director, Centre for Economic Data and Analysis, Ashoka University

Ashwini addressed demand and supply-side barriers to women's participation in the workforce. While there are barriers on both ends, and there is merit in addressing supply-side barriers, shifts in demand could catalyse social changes and effectively surmount these obstacles. Historically, demand has always shaped the supply - changes in the demand lead to inevitable changes in the supply.



Key Insights

The panel discussion was attended by over 400 participants, highlighting the widespread interest in gaining insights on fostering gender inclusivity in corporate settings.

400+ 
participants

Moderated by



Manisha Girotra
CEO, Moelis India



Prabha Narasimhan
Managing Director & CEO,
Colgate-Palmolive India
Ltd.



Shyamala Gopinath
Former Chairperson, HDFC
Bank, Former Deputy
Governor,
Reserve Bank of India



Sunita Cherian
Chief Culture Officer &
Senior Vice President,
Human Resources, Wipro



Shereen Bhan
Managing Editor, CNBC
TV-18

Addressing Biases

1

Shereen initiated the conversation by underscoring the challenge of inadequate infrastructure hindering women's entry into the workforce, despite their ambition. She noted, "Women aren't risk averse but risk aware," underscoring the need for environments conducive to women's participation.

2

Shyamala highlighted the merit-based competitive exam for hiring in the **Reserve Bank of India** as a noteworthy example of a gender-neutral process. She emphasised how this fosters a culture of meritocracy, where individuals are valued for their professional abilities rather than their gender, effectively mitigating social biases.

3

Prabha addressed the issue of unconscious biases prevalent in company culture, which hinder equity generation. At **Colgate-Palmolive India**, efforts are made to ensure a balanced slate at the hiring level, promoting equity within the workforce. Moreover, Prabha's team conducts workshops on unconscious biases, featuring role modelling and introspection to mitigate these biases.

4

Shymala noted the emergence of psychometric tests on employees' attitudes in companies today, contributing to the development of a more sensitive work culture.

Upholding the Essence

1

Shereen led the discussion on prevailing legal and industry mandates concerning women's representation in companies and boardrooms, emphasising the importance of intent and spirit beyond mere compliance with laws.

2

Manisha highlighted the growing discrimination against women in leadership positions, stressing the pivotal role of leaders in effecting cultural shifts. She underscored the **significance of legal mandates** in providing women with a platform to amplify their voices and catalyse increased representation, thereby creating a ripple effect.

Navigating the Technological Landscape

1

In navigating the Technological Landscape, **Shereen** highlighted the pressing dilemma concerning the impact of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** on workplace equity, pondering whether AI advancements would promote inclusivity or inadvertently marginalise women lacking AI skills.

2

Sunita underscored the importance of gender-balanced representation in AI-related roles to harness technology for gender equity effectively. Drawing from **Wipro's** initiatives, she emphasised the pivotal role of organisational support in providing exposure, flexible work arrangements, and sponsorship programs to empower women and bridge the skills gap in the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

3

Additionally, **Sunita** highlighted Wipro's remarkable statistics, including a 100% return rate for women after maternity leave, showcasing the company's commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

4

Shereen further emphasised the societal benefits of robust maternity leave policies, affirming, **"It isn't just the women who are benefitting, but the society at large is benefitting."** She also highlighted **Wipro's Enrich Programme**, a sponsorship initiative facilitating career advancement for middle management employees recommended by leaders to various projects and roles.



Fostering a Culture of Empowerment

1

Manisha underscored the importance of addressing systemic issues from the outset, emphasising that while quotas are crucial, comprehensive solutions must begin at the foundational level. She highlighted the improving supply side with increased access to education and advocated for destigmatizing **paternity leave**.

2

Stressing the necessity of allyship, **Manisha** called for concerted efforts to cultivate a generation of supportive men equipped to collaborate with empowered women effectively.

3

Building on this, **Sunita** noted Wipro's significant progress in increasing **women's representation at the CXO level**, highlighting the importance of realistic job descriptions to ensure fair opportunities for advancement.

4

Shyamala echoed the significance of collective action among women and stressed the need for leadership-driven mindset shifts to facilitate women's entry into the formal economy, "***The fundamental idea should be for organisations to empower women to thrive.***"

5

Prabha emphasised the role of support networks and employee resource groups in aiding women's professional advancement, particularly as they **navigate hierarchical structures within organisations**.

6

Summing up the discussion, **Shyamala** emphasised the overarching objective for organisations to empower women to thrive in all aspects of their professional journey.



The panel discussion on transitioning to gender-inclusive workplaces brought out critical themes ranging from addressing biases and upholding the essence of legal mandates to navigating the technological landscape and fostering a culture of empowerment. The panellists underscored the imperative of concerted efforts to create environments that empower women to thrive professionally. Moving forward, it is evident that advancing gender inclusivity requires holistic strategies, unwavering commitment from leadership, and collaborative action across industries to realise the vision of truly inclusive workplaces.

Actionable Points and Launch of the Circle of Champions

- 1 Develop Clear Action Plans**

The urgent need to bridge the gap between intent and action in implementing gender inclusivity initiatives was highlighted. Only 21% of companies have clear action plans, indicating a pressing need for organisations to translate research findings into practical strategies.
- 2 Foster Leadership Commitment**

Leadership commitment emerged as a pivotal factor in driving gender inclusivity. It was emphasised that leaders must not only set goals but also actively participate in fostering inclusive environments and implementing supportive policies.
- 3 Promote Industry-Specific Solutions**

Industry-specific challenges were acknowledged, underscoring the importance of tailoring solutions to address these unique barriers. From addressing biases in real estate to tapping into untapped talent in male-dominated industries like logistics, organisations must develop tailored approaches to foster gender inclusivity effectively.



Launching the Circle of Champions

Shereen Bhan's introduction of the Udaiti Foundation's Circle of Champions initiative further underscored the collective commitment to empowering women and promoting diversity. **Pooja Sharma Goyal (CEO, TUF)** issued two crucial calls to action:

- 1** Inviting changemakers to join the Circle of Champions initiative
- 2** Encouraging stakeholders to collaborate with Udaiti for impactful case studies and pilot projects.

“

In these endeavours, we emphasise the necessity of driving systemic changes to ensure inclusive workplaces where all individuals have equal opportunities to flourish and contribute meaningfully.



Annexure

List of Attendees (Roundtable and Panel Discussion)

Roundtable Discussion

S. No.	Name	Designation, Organisation
1	Megha Goel	Chief Human Resource Office (CHRO), Godrej Properties Ltd.
2	Kanika Mahajan	Associate Professor of Economics, CEDA, Ashoka University
3	Ashwini Deshpande	Ashoka University, Professor of Economics & Founding Director, CEDA
4	Akshi Chawla	Director, CEDA
5	Anisha Sharma	Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, CEDA, Ashoka University
6	Sri Rajan	Chair, Advisory Board, The Udaiti Foundation
7	Dr Sekhar Bonu	Advisor, The Udaiti Foundation
8	Sakshi Handa	Senior Vice President, Corporate HR & Group Talent, Mahindra & Mahindra
9	Raunika Malhotra	President, Corporate Band and Communication, Lodha Group
10	Priti Kataria	Senior Vice President and CHRO, Wipro Enterprise Futuring
11	Shailja Mehta	Director, Dasra
12	Neha Bagaria	Founder and CEO, HerKey
13	Suraj Saharan	Co-founder, COO, Delhivery
14	Alapinee	HR Lead (Emp Engagement, HR Tech, DEI, CSR and Wellness), ECW
15	Anamika Wani	Learning and Development Manager, Blue Dart
16	Himanshu Shah	Boehringer Ingelheim India
17	Avril Miranda Fernandes	Morgan Stanley, Executive Director - Talent Development, Diversity & Inclusion
18	Parneet Soni	HR Head, Retail Finance, Piramal Housing Finance
19	Qasim	D&I Lead, Alvarez and Marsal
20	Tanya Mehan	Director, People & Culture, GoYubi
21	Zoya	Diversity and Inclusion Lead, Godrej Properties Limited
22	Zainab Patel	Lead, Inclusion and Diversity, Pernod Ricard India
23	Pooja Raul	General Manager - Talent Acquisition at People Experience Center, Godrej Group
24	Prathana	HR at Godrej Agrovet
25	Kathryn Moore	Social Impact Manager, Lodha Group
26	Mahika	Head, Social Impact, Lodha Group
27	Jyoti Mallick	Head - Learning Talent DEI Reward, Godrej Properties Limited

Note: This is not an exhaustive list, a few roundtable attendees registered on the spot

Panel Discussion

S. No.	Name	Designation, Organisation
1	Nisaba Godrej	Executive Chairperson of Godrej Consumer Products
2	Ashish Dhawan	Founder and CEO of The Convergence Foundation
3	Manisha Girotra	CEO, Moelis India
4	Prabha Narasimhan	Managing Director & CEO, Colgate-Palmolive India Ltd.
5	Shyamala Gopinath	Former Chairperson, HDFC Bank, Former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India
6	Sunita Cherian	Chief Culture Officer & Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Wipro
7	Shereen Bhan	Managing Editor, CNBC TV-18

Women in India Inc. Summit