

You can't be what you can't see

Inspirational women in the India-UK business corridor

Shuchita Sonalika, Director and Head – UK, Confederation of Indian Industry

Women's economic empowerment is not a women's issue. Rather, it is a business issue. When more women work, economies grow, says the United Nations. Research from the McKinsey Global Institute estimates \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP if we fully bridge the gender gap. The global average of women's contribution to GDP is 37 percent, and India is much farther behind at 17 percent as one of the lowest regions in the world.

In a recent meeting I attended at Wilton Park, an FCO think tank, drew on the work of a High-Level UN Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. While there isn't a magic formula for removing the systemic constraints that hold women back, there is an important role for institutions to bring about change. The meeting focused on 3 areas for impact: opportunities for financial, digital inclusion and entrepreneurship for women-owned and women-led enterprises; addressing adverse norms, discriminatory beliefs and limiting practices that affect women's economic participation; and the unrecognised care economy.

Gender parity at work influences and enables greater parity in society – so if we want social norms to change, we've got to get better at including and integrating women in the workplace at all levels.

"But you can't be what you can't see", said a passionate participant at Wilton Park and this quickly became one of my favourite phrases, almost like a mantra. So I pledged that I would

Mira Kaushik OBE, Akademi



Mira, the Director of Akademi, a renowned South-Asian performing arts center, has the opportunity of shaping a new-age work culture. She has developed Akademi as an efficiently-run,

woman-led organisation, with a majority female workforce, known for its excellent working conditions. "An equal opportunities policy and transparent HR guides Akademi to make fair decisions. Regular training opportunities, encouragement to communicate freely and board mentorship schemes enable the team to evolve", says Mira. "Akademi celebrates motherhood through flexible work policies, allowing employees to invest time in child care and self-care. This has helped in getting the best out of the team!"



Women run businesses take greater account of risk, offer a safer investment for banks and funding institutions, and are more likely to invest more in developing their workforce. Given that the majority spend is by women, surely it makes business sense to bolster the number of women operated or owned businesses. A no brainer!"

Shehla Hasan, Confederation of British Industry

Country Director for the British Industry for nearly 6 years, Shehla has championed the UK India Women's Leadership Network. "Businesses suffer



from unconscious bias. Decisions are taken by both men and women which may be biased against women, without intending to. This affects women's professional growth prospects and their negotiating ability vis-a-vis their male counterparts. Family is the first unit where women give more but think

Kiran Khatri, High Commission of India



Kiran is a Special Advisor to the High Commissioner of India in London. Managing everything behind the scenes, with her hallmark hyper-efficiency, she works to ensure the

their new 'Hero'?"

Jo is a familiar face in the India-UK corridor. Recounting her journey, she says, "I was asked in 2017 to take up the co-leadership of the India Services Group at Deloitte. My first reaction was one of pride but I was also worried. I had worked on the corridor for many years but I suddenly wondered how I would be accepted as a woman. I decided that the best thing to do was to be true to myself, my style of working, communication and leadership. You must not be afraid to challenge or debate where necessary. I can honestly say after 12 months in the role, I have never felt that being a woman is in point, as it is ultimately your actions that define you, not your gender."



11 Inspirational women in the India-UK business corridor

To mark International Women's Day, I turn the spotlight on inspiring women who are playing an important role in the India-UK business corridor, where my work is focused. This is not a complete or comprehensive list. These are women who have been beside me, ahead of me and rock solid behind me, in my journey. It is inspiring to hear their ideas and the challenges they have faced, and the contributions they have made in their journeys to break the glass ceiling and challenge the status quo.

Bina Mehta, KPMG



Bina is a champion of women's participation and career growth. Having mentored many young entrepreneurs, she is one you quickly count in your close networks. "Pay it forward" is her biggest advice. "Successful businesses build an inclusive environment where colleagues can achieve their full potential. There is a great deal that businesses can do to empower women. Mentoring for female rising stars is particularly successful. Flexible working options support women to balance work and home. Having succeeded, female leaders should pay it forward, and support younger women starting out in their careers to be the best that they can be."

to bolster the India-UK relationship. "In India, the public sector is a beacon of best practices when it comes to gender equality and equity. I am fortunate to be a part of the Indian Foreign Service, head by Hon'ble Minister Sushma Swaraj, which comprises 135 women officers who have reached the highest offices with their competence," she beams.

Nandita Sahgal Tully, ThomasLloyd Group



Nandita, Managing Director, ThomasLloyd Group, climbed her way to the top. "It never ceases to amaze me that brilliant, capable women bow out of fulfilling their career potential because the workplace is often not flexible to have both—family and career," she says. When she was appointed CEO, she shatterd that glass ceiling, but such positions can make it quite difficult to balance home life. "I had 12 days annual leave in 2 years! Balancing work and family remains a paramount challenge for women. But if organisations have more women in leadership roles, it can help ensure that more women are in positions with the authority to decide and negotiate on issues that affect them."

Baroness Sandip Verma, House of Lords



Baroness Verma, a former UK Energy and Climate Change Minister, and the co-founder of POWERful Women, says "Research demonstrates women in business would add trillions of dollars to the global economy."

ceiling that needs to be broken is at home," she says.

Sophie Charbonneau, Varana World



Sophie is the Managing Director of Varana World, high-end fashion boutique in Mayfair inspired by Indian traditional textiles. "Empowering women in business is not a matter of

positive affirmation but true recognition of talent and experience," says Sophie. "Having worked in some of the most prestigious fashion houses, I have crossed paths with very few senior women. Although the industry comprises of a majority of female clientele, it is still mid-majority of female clientele, white men at the CEO and Chairman levels. Diversity of race, gender and education is key for any organization to grasp modern world complexity."

Baroness Usha Prashar, House of Lords



Baroness Prashar, Deputy Chair of the British Council, has been at the forefront of the India-UK Year of Culture as the Chair of the Board of Patrons. She has seen the confidence and assertiveness of women growing over time, and she couldn't be more pleased. "The onus today lies with both-companies to reach out to women, and for women themselves to claim their seat at the table," she says. "They deserve to be at the table, but they've got to grab the opportunity. We must bring men into this discussion. It is about mutual benefit by enabling diverse perspectives and new age ideas from both men and women!"