MY LEARNING ON THE SIDE EVENT HOSTED BY THE PERMANENT MISSION OF INDIA TO THE UN:

GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP AND TRANSFORMATION: CHARTING THE PATH OF EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

This event began at 3:00 PM on 3/16/2023 in Conference room 2. I met some NGO representatives from Kerala, who were waiting for this event to begin. We talked about what we do at our respective NGOs and exchanged our business cards to keep in touch. When we entered the conference room at 2:45 PM, the floor was just getting ready to set up.

Conference Room 2

Later, the event began. It was conducted by Women 20 (W20), which is the official G20 engagement group focused on gender equity. The event began with the Introduction given by Dharitri Patnaik, Chief Coordinator of W20 India. She spoke on how the process of Gender Equality slowed down due to the pandemic. The Prime Minister's Office is working on women's development and more especially on Women-Led Development. Every woman living in this digital age must push back the barriers that come amid her development. The key tool is to bridge the gender digital divide. This is no doubt a challenge for all to get an equitable and sustainable future for all.

Speakers and Panelists on the side event

There 15% of the rural population still has no electricity and 10% of the rural population with no mobile network. To achieve digital literacy, we must strive to narrow the bridge in the digital workforce and access to technology in the remotest areas.

Ruchira Kamboj, Madam Ambassador (Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

Next, the floor was given to Ruchira Kamboj, Madam Ambassador (Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, she spoke on how gender doesn't define potential and nothing is impossible for women if given a chance to fly. About 47% of women and girls are in the ICT sector as of now. In STEM, women's entrepreneurship has helped India to reach the sky like never before. At the grassroots level, more than 1.4 million women representatives lead in the implementation of

public policies. She emphasized the fact that without gender equality, neither sustainable development nor peaceful and equitable development is possible. She concluded her remarks by pointing out that there can't be positive progress unless 50% of the global population is not given the chance to accelerate growth.

Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women

Next, Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, spoke on the new form of poverty in this era – The digital divide. Closing the gender digital divide is one of the key areas of action. Digital Education is more likely to give foundational help in solving this. Ensuring leadership positions for women is another way that can be both managerial and executive positions. Also by ensuring transparency and accountability on digital tools, companies must adopt participatory design where women lead. There should be measures to tackle hate speech and Gender-Based Violence but online and offline. They also had a toll set to understand how many people would like to have Artificial Intelligence usage to curd the pandemic, and there were more than 100k responses. Women's exclusiveness reduces the potential for innovation and lowers GDP in middle-income countries. To ensure and overcome the digital divide, we must ensure inclusive interventions which must be involving governments, local organizations, private sectors, and also civil society.
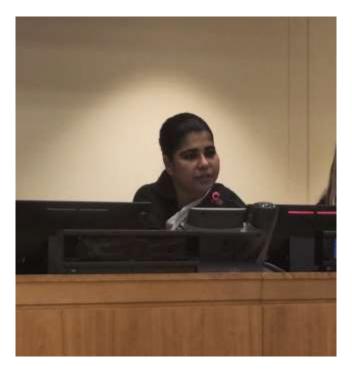
Chair of W20 Sandhya Purecha

Next, the floor was given to the Chair of W20 Sandhya Purecha spoke on how in the rural areas, women greatly participate in businesses and policies. There are almost 1 million mobile accessibilities given to women, which is very vital for technology penetration and digital growth. Due to the rise of internet access, women are given much-needed time and space which has created a major social impact on the lives of women in India. Rural India is very digitally Savvy (Tech Savvy) - Prime Minister's National Digital Ministry on Digital India Program aims to bridge the digital divide in rural areas. In rural areas, more than 53% have enrolled in digital training, more than 54% trained and more than 54% have also been certified. Digital Shakthi keeps track of online illegal activities, stands against cybersecurity threats that are fought and make aware to women as well. Mobile Shakthi Kendra helps to develop digital skills and generate employment, and this platform was able to increase digital literacy in 115 backward districts. Since 2019, the growth in rural India is such that women are known to use the internet much higher than men!

Other than that India has progressed in several areas such as widespread access to electricity, natural hygiene methods, and providing clean drinking water. Although 40% of the people are connected to agrarian work directly or indirectly, girls getting high school education have almost tripled in the past three years and are leading India including the areas of the startup ecosystem.

Tech ecosystems and startups in India are the largest in the world. And these reforms are helping low-income families, by providing access, transforming their lives, and more importantly national potential. Telemedicine can connect doctors and patients via technology which is proof that technology is powering its way in digital India.

To bridge the digital gaps, an investment must be made from the early stage of childhood schooling in the areas of digital literacy. This includes, providing more access to girls' education in STEM areas and should include innovative ways to teach them. To progress the rural areas, women should be encouraged by providing accessibility to ICTs. Holistic and cross-sectoral policies are to be included as a part of including women in decision-making positions.

Later, the panelists were given the floor. Dr. Jyothi Kiran Shukla, economist, and policy expert spoke first. The growth rate of women's labor force participation is falling and is 6-7%, especially for women with digitization. Thus, it clearly sets our economic goal priority. There should be a radical change in financial architecture. Including women even at the lowest level and highest levels. Women on average in rural areas spend 45 mins per day carrying water, this can be transformed by funding them in education, skills, and digital governance. The scripting language of digitization must be gender centric only then some positive progress could be witnessed.

Bharathi Ghosh, a Former Indian Police Service officer

Next, Bharathi Ghosh, a Former Indian Police Service officer, and Former UN member gave a brilliant speech on the 'Nari Shakthi' (Women Power). She spoke on how the emergence of women's empowerment in technology was harnessed for the global good. India provided vaccination to many countries in need during the Covid-19 pandemic. She spoke about how there
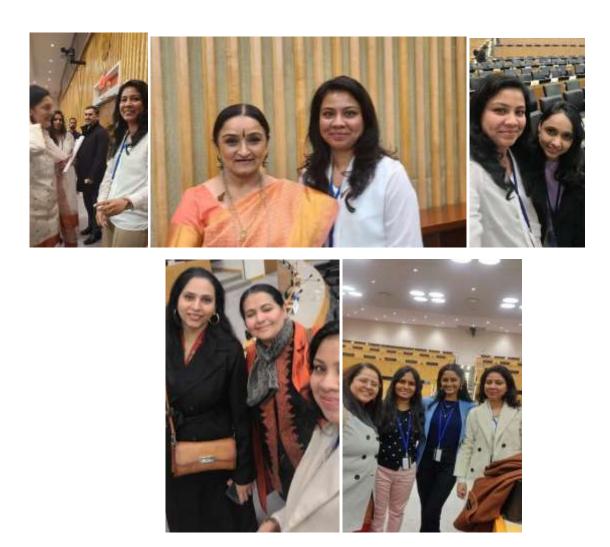
was a silent revolution happening within India during this time which was unaware of. The Digital 'Sarthaks' (the one who is significant), who were mostly women, came out of their homes with masks and smartphones, under PM Modi leadership to help the front line works. When all countries were beating the effects on the economy caused by the pandemic, India came out strong due to the 'Modi Magic' that transformed the lives of many women in India. The women were known as nation builders and due to the water entitlement project, providing tap water to rural India, women's empowerment was made stronger.

Then she spoke on how some inclusive programs for women were prioritized in India for the sole purpose of women empowerment. Under the standup India scheme, 81% are women entrepreneurs. More than 88% of the women are working for self-help government programs. Under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana scheme (financial inclusion program of the Government of India open to Indian citizens), every household was supposed to have 1 bank account, but because of people's interest in this scheme - more than 80 million bank accounts were created! Amongst the 80,000 startups, 40% are women entrepreneurs. Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao Yojana (focuses on challenging mindsets and deep-rooted patriarchy in the societal system over girl child) was created for every girl to be educated and to make them financially independent. She ended her speech here.

Photos were taken during and after the event

This event ended at 4:15 PM. I spoke to Madam Ambassador and chair of W 20, Sandhya Purecha, and congratulated them on a brilliant side event and spoke a little about Utah International Mountain Forum and how here we advocate for mountain communities.

I got into networking with many people around the conference room. I was lucky to meet like-minded representatives from Maharashtra and Tamil Nādu, who were also working on research and implementation of sustainable food systems. Also, I met the president of the India center in NYC who performs cultural activities and creates awareness of India among people living in New York. There was also an official from the PM office who spoke on how fantastic my speech was during the side event hosted by the Kyrgyz republic and she finds the work we do at UIMF very unique. My talk with all these people went on till 5 PM and then I called it a day and started heading home.

-*Priyanka Prem Kumar, UIMF Member*