

BRICS CCI WE

Trailblazers Roundtable Whitepaper

on

Accelerate Action for a Gender Equal World



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Out of the estimated 3.8 billion women in the world population, over 2 billion live in the BRICS nations. The world will never realize women empowerment in its real essence without empowering the women of the BRICS countries. The BRICS CCI WE Trailblazers Roundtable on the theme of International Women's Day 2025- Accelerate Action served as a vital forum to address the urgency of achieving gender parity. At the current trajectory, full gender equality may not be realized until 2158—five generations from now (World Economic Forum). The roundtable convened global thought leaders, policymakers, corporate executives, entrepreneurs and change-makers to identify key strategies and actionable solutions to dismantle systemic barriers and biases in personal and professional spheres.

Understanding the Urgency of “Accelerating Action”

Achieving gender equality requires immediate intervention and structural reform across various dimensions, including:

- **Cultural and Societal Barriers:** Addressing entrenched norms that hinder women's leadership growth and participation in decision-making roles.
- **Gender Pay Gap:** Examining disparities in pay and their long-term impact on economic empowerment.
- **Women Leadership Role Models and Mentorship:** The role of influential women in inspiring and guiding future generations.
- **Legal Framework and Policy Support:** Reviewing global best practices in legislation and policy to ensure gender equality.
- **Resilient Systems for Women's Education and Health:** Post-pandemic strategies to enhance access to education and healthcare for women.
- **Gender Gaps in Education:** Analyzing literacy rates, enrolment trends, and the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields.
- **Mental Health of Women:** Understanding the pandemic's social and economic effects on women's psychological well-being.
- **Women's Representation in Leadership:** Identifying challenges in the effective implementation of gender quotas in corporate and political leadership.
- **Business Case for Gender Diversity:** How diverse leadership enhances business performance and innovation.
- **Cross-Cultural Solutions:** Examining successful models of gender equality from different cultural contexts.
- **Role of Men in Gender Equality:** Encouraging men to actively support gender balance at work and home.
- **State and Societal Support Structures:** Exploring the need for facilities like creches and skilling programs to help women attain and retain leadership roles.



Key Recommendations

- The media is far more interested in issues of politics and economics, we need to make gender part of the mainstream discourse.
- There must be fruitful acceleration programmes for young entrepreneurs, for women who have an interest in international cooperation and entrepreneurship. This can be scaled up with all BRICS countries.
- Realistically, we need to set our goals for the next five years. We must mandate 33% quota for the women, whether it is a boardroom, in judiciary or whether it is in the other cultural sectors.
- Politics, which brings women to the high table of decision making, is the first sector where everybody should come together. We should set up an international fund also, if it is not international, at least a national fund, to support women candidates in elections or for women entrepreneurship, so that if they require it, we should help them and support them in every way.
- We should have a lot of global accountability in management to establish international monitoring models, such as human-backed gender leadership index to track women representation in business and legal industries.
- We should invest in women entrepreneurs who are job creators for the future, encourage women VCs, mentorship programmes, expand access to microfinance, venture capitals, leadership, training for working and business.
- Gender-responsive budgets, which we have in India are very important to highlight the role of women in the economy. The issue of equal pay for equal work needs much more focus.
- We could have ISO standards for women's leadership. If a woman is leading it, and there are maximum number of women who are working in that business, there should be an international gender certification.
- We have 12.2 million women entrepreneurs of which 90% are in the informal sector, which means they are beyond of the guardrails of many legal safeguards that you have if you are in an established business. Women have little financial literacy and access to credit that you need to set up your own business. Many women are not aware of government schemes for them, and they do not have safe mobility to go out and work for their businesses.
- Just 1.2% of procurement is given to women in all businesses. Without procurement of materials, how do you start your businesses?
- Most decisions relating to a woman's progress in life are made by a man so we need to generate awareness among men. We must involve men in family planning, after all, number of children is one thing which holds many women back. If you have a smaller family, it's much easier for women to get back into the workforce. Caregiving is also another thing which falls on the women. So, we need a much greater involvement of men in programs which are aimed at empowering women.



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Textbooks and cartoons that our kids are watching should portray equal parenting.

- We need a council for women that is supporting dispute resolution. Once a dispute occurs, there are many difficulties. There's MSMEs created for minor and small micro-industries. There should be one forum which is created to do due diligence, facilitation and dispute resolution for women. Arbitration rules that can be amended to suit women-led business.
- BRICS heads of state have been asked to help women work with the New Development Bank in establishing what we will call the BRICS Women Advancement Fund.
- India has good laws for gender equality. But women are afraid to claim their rights. We must incorporate gender neutrality studies in school curriculums. (The India Constitution is gender neutral)
- We must highlight women's success stories to encourage other women to start businesses.
- Women should be enabled to take time off from work and come back whenever they deem fit without suffering in terms of employment prospects and skilling. Women need conditioning, choice and confidence, the three Cs.
- There is something called hidden GDP. All the work that women do every day, day in, day out, that is contribution to hidden GDP. If women were not doing it, someone else was supposed to do it, and they were supposed to be paid. That would have ultimately gone back and added to the GDP.
- Data collection, analysis is very important. That's something that we should quickly focus on across geographies, because that's very important, gender desegregated data. Skilling is very important. Without skills, new age skills, we are nowhere.
- State must support maternity benefits in companies as otherwise, it may not be profitable to hire more women.
- Women entrepreneurs can use AI to start their own business, creating innovative solutions and products. One area which AI can be used in immediately is education. Educational tools should be used to reach to the masses in the rural areas and particularly in the urban areas in whatever and wherever the field is lacking.



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Ms. Kalpana Sharma

*Former Additional Secretary to Lok Sabha- Parliament of India;
Senior Advisor- BRICS CCI; Founder Principal Advisor to FORE
Centre for Political Leadership and Governance- Session Chair*

“ Women must play a central role in shaping emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, not only as users but as innovators and decision-makers. Equally, political representation remains a critical lever for systemic change.

Today's discussion has been a powerful reminder that collaboration, mentorship, and leadership are key to unlocking a future where women don't just participate but lead the way.”



Ms. Ruby Sinha

President, BRICS CCI WE



“ Accelerate Action' is not just a theme; it is an urgent call for systemic change. We need more women with a seat at the table when it comes to decision making. Women need partnerships, active networks and financial literacy to succeed in a competitive marketplace. We need transformative solutions to the needs of women entrepreneurs, we need to amplify the voices of women in all relevant forums across the world so that their needs and challenges are not an after-thought at international meetings.

Ms. Lebogang Zulu

National Chairperson - BRICS Women's Business Alliance South Africa

“ Women are not just participants in the global economy—we are its driving force. Yet, true economic equity remains elusive. As we stand five years from the SDG 2030 milestone, we must ask: are we truly making progress, or merely counting participation? It is time for women to claim their place at decision-making tables, lead industrialization, and shape policies that drive sustainable, inclusive growth. The BRICS Women's Business Alliance remains committed to forging partnerships that uplift women as entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders in the global economic landscape.



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Dr. Nandini Sharma

Former Councillor, New Delhi

“ We must set tangible goals for the next five years to ensure that gender equality moves beyond discussion and into real, measurable progress. From mandating representation in leadership to expanding financial access for women entrepreneurs, every step we take today will shape a more equitable future for the next generation. Because when women rise, societies thrive.



Ms. Lalita Panicker

Consulting Editor, Hindustan Times



“ With only 15% of businesses in India being women-owned and 90% of women entrepreneurs operating in the informal sector, the barriers to entry are immense—lack of access to credit, limited mobility, and minimal procurement opportunities. But beyond policy interventions, we must challenge deeply ingrained societal norms. When a young girl expresses the desire to be an entrepreneur, she should be encouraged, not dissuaded. True progress will come when we engage men in conversations around financial literacy, caregiving, and decision-making, ensuring that women have the support, resources, and agency to succeed.

Ms. Elena Shifrina

CEO & Founder, BioFoodLab

“ My journey, from a young girl in a modest home to an entrepreneur reshaping the food industry, proves that with determination, education, and support, women can break any barrier. I have seen firsthand the power of storytelling in inspiring the next generation of women leaders. We must accelerate action by fostering an environment where women dare to dream, take risks, and lead. Change begins with visibility, mentorship and unwavering support because when women rise, entire economies and societies thrive.



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Amrita Grover

Advocate at Supreme Court of India

“ True empowerment lies not just in representation but in reshaping the systems that govern us. In a profession as male dominated as litigation, women continue to face systemic barriers, whether in pay parity, judicial representation, or access to dispute resolution mechanisms. While the 33% reservation in the Lok Sabha is a step forward, we need similar commitments in our courts. A legal system that truly serves its people must reflect their diversity. It is time we accelerate action by ensuring women in law are not just present but empowered to lead, decide, and redefine justice for all.



Dr. Valli Arunachalam

Semiconductor Technologist and Philanthropist

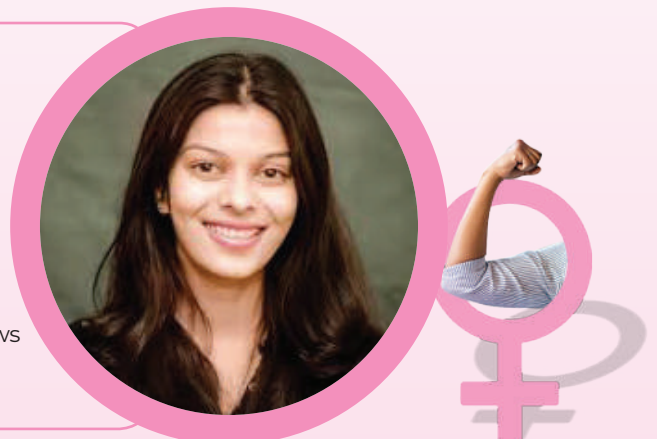
“ Newton's second law tells us that force equals mass times acceleration. If we want to 'Accelerate Action' for women's empowerment, we must increase our force strategically while reducing the headwinds that hold us back. This means forming nimble, focused groups, identifying barriers, and taking targeted, impactful action. My work with Women of Tamil Nadu has shown that real change happens when we move beyond words and take direct action—like equipping rural women with financial literacy to scale their businesses and transform their communities. Science has never failed us, and if we apply these principles, neither will we.



Ms. Anuradha Chowdhary

Founder & CEO, ZeroTo3 Collective

“ Laws alone cannot drive change, action does. Women must be empowered not just with rights but with the confidence to claim them. Fear of consequences holds many women back from seeking justice, be it in workplaces, businesses, or even family matters like property rights. The key to accelerating action is education and awareness, leveraging digital platforms, short-form content, and cross-border collaborations to ensure that every woman, no matter where she is, knows her rights and feels equipped to stand up for them.



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Ms. Tatiana Seliverstova

Founder of the International Trade and Investment Company “Consult Invest ITIC”;
Director of the International Award “TOP 100 BRICS Entrepreneurs”; Director of the International
Acceleration Program “BRICS Business Incubator” and “SCO Business Incubator”

“ Action is more powerful than words, and now is the time to accelerate change. I propose three concrete initiatives to empower women in business: launching the first Russian Indian Women Federation program to foster cross-border entrepreneurship, expanding the BRICS Young Entrepreneurs Award to spotlight outstanding young women leaders, and building a collaborative platform to share best practices on women’s empowerment across BRICS nations. These are not just ideas—they are commitments. I am ready to invest in these initiatives, create meaningful business connections, and amplify success stories so that more women see themselves as global leaders. Together, we can turn ambition into achievement.



Ms. Shabana Nasim

Executive Director, BRICS CCI; Chief Patron, BRICS CCI WE



“ True acceleration begins with awareness, igniting an awakening that propels us to action. We must foster a society where every woman is empowered to be an achiever, dismantling the outdated conditioning that undervalues their potential. We must champion mental fortitude, encouraging women to exercise their rights and recognize their intrinsic strength, for it is the strength of the mind that truly transforms potential into achievement.

Ms. Shivani Singh Kapoor

Co-Founder, ThinkStartup

“ It is inspiring to be here and to hear the incredible stories of resilience and ambition. As someone who works with women across age groups—students, professionals, and entrepreneurs—I see firsthand the headwinds they face. From early conditioning to navigating life stages and building financial independence, the challenges are real. But so is the opportunity for action. We need more role models, stronger policies for career re-entry, and a fundamental shift in how we empower women financially. It’s time to not just talk about change but accelerate action.



Sanghamitra Buddhapriya

Dean (Academics) FORE School of Management, New Delhi

“ While women’s representation in leadership has improved, the journey ahead demands more than just policies—it requires a mindset shift. My research shows that work-life conflict, lack of mentoring, and fear of success often hold women back. Organizations must go beyond structural changes and invest in fostering confidence, resilience, and an androgynous leadership style that blends compassion with assertiveness. To truly accelerate action, we must not only open doors for women but also empower them to walk through with confidence.



Ms. Shormishtha Ghosh

Body Member, BRICS CCI & MD-Intandem Consultancy

“ Accelerating action for women’s economic inclusion means breaking down the systemic barriers that have long kept them from equal participation. The gender pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership, and lack of financial access are not isolated challenges but interconnected hurdles rooted in societal structures. Women’s contributions to the hidden GDP—the unpaid labor that sustains economies—must be acknowledged and integrated into mainstream economic policies. We must bridge the information gap so that women, especially in rural areas, can access opportunities and funding that already exist. The key is not just policy but also awareness, collaboration, and execution. When we involve both men and women in the conversation, we pave the way for sustainable and inclusive progress.



Ms. Ankita Sachdev

Joint Director, BRICS CCI

“ Accelerating action for gender equality starts at home. True empowerment is not about giving women more power, it’s about reshaping societal norms to foster equal parenting and shared responsibilities, both in workplaces and households. From the stories we tell our children to the roles we normalize in our daily lives, we must break stereotypes and build a future where equality is instinctive, not aspirational. Change begins when we challenge traditions, redefine success, and create an ecosystem where every individual, regardless of gender, can thrive.





Future Outlook

The roundtable concluded with reflections on progress made toward gender parity and key areas requiring urgent focus. It established concrete action points for businesses, governments, and civil society to collaborate on advancing gender-balanced leadership by 2030. The session provided a roadmap to accelerate gender equality efforts, ensuring that women have equal opportunities to lead, innovate, and drive change in every sector of society.

By **“Accelerating Action,”** the **BRICS CCI WE Trailblazers Roundtable** sought to catalyze transformative policies, inclusive workplaces, and resilient systems that enable women to thrive as leaders and change-makers globally.

