

For an equal future G20's gender vision

The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration 2023 can only be described using two adjectives – inclusive and visionary. This Declaration firmly underscores the vital role of women in shaping a sustainable future amidst a multitude of global crises, ranging from climate crisis-induced extreme weather events to pandemics.

Right from the outset, the Declaration makes its commitment crystal clear: G20 nations are dedicated to closing gender gaps and promoting “the full, equal, effective, and meaningful participation of women” in the economy as decision-makers. This commitment takes inspiration from the early prioritisation of “women-led development” announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Bali Summit 2022. The New Delhi Declaration dedicates a distinct section to “gender equality and empowering all women and girls,” recognising India's successful efforts to integrate the gender agenda into the G20 communique.

The Declaration emphasises the urgency to address the root causes of gender inequality. It highlights the need to close gender gaps, enhance women's participation, reduce the gender gap in labour force participation, improve access to quality education — particularly in STEM fields — eliminate the gender pay gap, and ensure equal access to decent jobs.

Globally, gender parity in the labour market remains a challenge. According to the International Labour Organization's World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2023 report, the labour force participation rate of women stood at 47.4% in 2022, compared with 72.3% for men. “The gap of 24.9 percentage points means that for every economically inactive man, there are two such women,” the ILO further states, indicating that deep gender disparities continue to persist in workforce engagement, even post-pandemic.

Addressing this concern, one of the standout goals in the Declaration is the reaffirmation of the commitment to the Brisbane Goal (2014), which aims to reduce the gap in labour force participation by 2025, as well as implementing the G20 Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Goal '25 by 25' that asks for “more, better and equally paid jobs for women”.

Recognising that this exclusion often results from disparities in care work performed by men and women, forcing women to leave education and their jobs, the Declaration stresses the pressing need to redistribute the burden of women's care responsibilities. It highlights that investing in social protection and care infrastructure is not only a matter of gender equality, but also a fundamental human rights issue.

Currently, women bear two to three times more unpaid care work than men, limiting their ability to pursue economic opportunities. Redistributing this burden could empower women to engage actively in education and employment, creating a more equitable and prosperous society. Today, almost half (42%) of women and girls worldwide remain outside the formal financial system, with a persistent 7% gender gap.

The Declaration further emphasises the imperative of the urgent necessity to close this gap, especially in the context of preparing women for the jobs of the future. In an era dominated by automation and the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence, technologies have opened an array of new avenues of employment.

However, there is a significant risk of leaving women behind if we fail to equip them with the skills needed to navigate these new digital realities. According to a McKinsey report, “between 40 million and 160 million women globally may need to transition between occupations by

2030,” necessitating that they be “skilled, mobile, and tech-savvy”. Bridging the digital divide ensures that women have access to better paying and more fulfilling jobs, paving the way for a more productive and inclusive economy.

Recognising women’s pivotal role in climate action, the Declaration commits to enhancing their participation and leadership in climate initiatives. Given that women and girls are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, especially in terms of food security and livelihood, the Declaration encourages investments in sustainable agriculture and food systems.

Moreover, it is highly encouraging to witness the G20’s dedication to listening to a multitude of diverse perspectives and voices. This commitment is exemplified by the integration of the Chair’s Statement, which gathered unanimous approval at the G20 Ministerial Conference for Women Empowerment in Gandhinagar in August.

Finally, the formation of a working group to champion gender equality initiatives is a significant leap forward. We keenly anticipate its inaugural meeting during the Brazilian G20 presidency, where concrete actions will transform promises into progress.

India’s G20 presidency stands as a shining example of pioneering women-led development and leadership. This groundbreaking approach not only sets the stage for upcoming presidencies, starting with Brazil, but also positions the Global South at the forefront of this advocacy. It’s a resounding endorsement of values that prioritise people, the planet, and prosperity.

India has not only emerged as a thought leader, but also as an action leader in drafting the G20 Action Plan on Sustainable Development through Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. This plan underscores the significance of innovative financing mechanisms and increased, flexible finances to fulfill the commitments made in the Declaration. UN Women, among numerous partners, has worked tirelessly with the government of India to mainstream the gender agenda in the G20 declaration.

The 2022 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum reports that it will take another 132 years to close the global gender gap. We do not have the luxury of such a long time period. We need to do it in a decade. This as Prime Minister Modi has emphasised requires tackling critical issues of women’s access to finance, entrepreneurship, labour force participation and placing them in leadership position.

In the New Delhi Declaration, G20 nations have made a resolute commitment to walk together and ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of building a sustainable and inclusive future. This declaration is an unequivocal promise that no woman will be left behind in this One Earth, One Family, One Future.

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