

Applying a Feminist Lens to India's Foreign Policy

A Compendium of Essays



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**Kubernein
Initiative**

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Design Process

We have engaged with experts through this project that have helped us understand the effects of an added gender lens to their areas of expertise. The pen breaking into the ink represents the ripples that we hope this publication will create to grow this body of work in the coming years.

Design Team

This report was designed by Bokaap Design led by Founder & Creative Director Niraali Parekh.

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Introduction

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Why do we need to apply a gender lens to traditional areas of foreign policy?

In the past decade countries across the world have witnessed, to varying degrees, political, social, ecological, and economic upheaval. Turmoil of any nature and size has maximum impact on marginalised sections of society, and women in particular, that often already lack agency due to existing social norms, often rooted in patriarchy. These are sections of society that require attention not only on compelling humanitarian grounds, but also because more equal societies fare better in terms of human and economic development indicators. As countries seek to re-build and find their place in a changing world order, bringing an inclusionary lens to policies can bring about a more transformational change. The idea of a feminist foreign policy opens avenues for such broad and innovative thinking, both within countries and across systems of global governance and norms.

Core concept of Feminist Foreign Policy

A Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) takes a bottom-up approach to re-thinking traditional power structures; going beyond the limited, often-binary, interpretation of the word 'Feminist', to include a more intersectional ideology. Principles of a feminist foreign policy stem from keeping human rights at its centre, where policy decisions are made acknowledging the disproportional impact on vulnerable groups. The core ideals and systems of such policies also understands and allows for vulnerable groups to differ and therefore ensure that policies and decision makers account for such change.

The approach rests on two important pillars: (1) Greater representation at the decision-making table. Not just in terms of numbers but with the aim to create environments that foster innovative thinking and allow for diverse representation. (2) Policy outputs that consider the impact on women and the marginalised. Where gender is a consideration in foreign policy outputs such as development assistance policy, trade, environment, health and all forms of emerging threats and security considerations.

Countries that have adopted A Feminist Foreign Policy

Sweden was the first country to announce a FFP in 2014. Since then France, Canada, Luxemburg, Spain, Mexico, Germany and most recently the Netherlands, have made official announcements that use the term 'Feminist' to describe some or all parts of their foreign policy. Several countries while not formally using the term 'Feminist' have taken considerable efforts to include the gender lens in their external actions. Germany for instance, only recently (December 2021) transitioned from using the word 'gender' to 'Feminist'. Argentina is another such example that includes gender mainstreaming in its foreign policy without using the term 'Feminist'. Chile and Libya have formally announced an intent, as a step towards a more formal announcement. Countries adopting such a policy have done so as per their context specific needs. Sweden has added on to existing efforts on making operational the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, under the aegis of UNSCR 1325. Mexico uses its FFP to spur affirmative action and embraces in its definition an inclusive policy, where the potential impact of policy initiatives is studied keeping in mind not just women, but other marginalised groups in the country.

Defining the scope of the compendium of essays

The FFP and similar gender mainstreaming approaches could provide the perspective required to help India prepare and deal with the uncertain nature of evolving challenges to human security in a manner that is inclusive and equitable. We believe that by engaging in current evolving discussions, India can bring greater diversity in thinking and provide its unique perspective to a discussion that is still largely centred in the transatlantic western space.

We must recognize that the traditional way of how we engage with foreign policy needs revisiting. Today for example, women's peace and security issues are central to any negotiations or engagement on peace processes. Countries and multilateral agencies are more cognizant of that need and are trying to articulate that perspective in different spheres of foreign policy engagement. We are also witnessing many countries overturn democratically elected governments and move to more authoritarian and repressive regimes, in South Asia and beyond. This has contracted the space for equitable and inclusive engagement and any foreign policy considerations under such circumstances will require a well-defined gendered (feminist) perspective, to ensure that we do not endorse or help promote inequity and marginalization.

Our research shows that while India may not have a Feminist Foreign Policy, there is considerable evidence on gender being a consideration in certain areas of its external actions, which could then benefit from more robust and sustained gender mainstreaming initiatives. Then there are also those areas of policy where we find that taking an alternate approach is the need of the hour. While India might consider adopting its own form of a FFP in the future, there is plenty of action to learn and build from without necessarily reinventing the wheel. Many of our actions and ideas, also present as potential examples for our partners in the neighbourhood and beyond. We do not believe the announcement or creation of a FFP is a onetime event, but rather a collaborative movement. Through this compendium of essays, we present the thoughts and ideas of leading researchers and thinkers that apply the gender lens to areas of public policy under their domain of expertise.

The six themes under consideration

Climate Change and Disaster Management

India has taken a key interest in leading climate change and disaster management initiatives both in the region as well as globally, where some gender considerations are observed. For the very first time, business models developed by the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which India helped establish along with France in 2015, took gender equity into consideration, especially for the solar pumping programme. India has also, through a grant to the Barefoot College, helped support the Solar Grandmother's

Programme, where non-literate older women from remote rural areas in various geographic regions are trained in basic engineering to ensure upkeep and proper functioning of solar panels in their communities. India also established the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure in 2019 and is the first country which has drawn a comprehensive national plan to fully achieve the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030. The Sendai framework emphasises that “women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes.”

In her essay, Dr. Dhanasree Jayaram applies a gender lens to India’s climate diplomacy. Women and marginalised groups face disproportionate vulnerabilities because of climate change, and there is a strong need to include diversity and inclusivity in climate diplomacy in the face of an alarming crisis. While some of India’s policies reflect gendered dimensions, especially in areas of disaster management, there is still room for improvement and greater gender mainstreaming.

Development Cooperation and Assistance

India’s foreign aid commitments have increased steadily over the years, and in 2019–20 there was a 25 per cent increase from the previous year’s INR 67.94 billion (USD 993 million). India’s approach to its foreign assistance differs from the traditional prescriptive approach towards aid, as it is guided primarily by the priorities of the partners. This includes the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), which since its launch in 1964, has provided training and scholarships to students, government, and private personnel to boost capacity building, to benefit India’s neighbours and some African countries. The MEA through the Ministry of Agriculture, has undertaken several innovative projects in Africa to promote food security and infrastructure development. India has also robustly provided aid and assistance to Afghanistan. From 2015 to 2017, USAID partnered with the Governments of India and Afghanistan to support the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), an Indian women’s cooperative, to implement the Afghan Women’s Empowerment Program.

There is considerable evidence to show that India has also taken some initiative in incorporating gender mainstreaming approaches to aid, development, and assistance, through project planning, giving grants

and loans, and in capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives. While the list of projects in partner countries that benefit women is long, gender is not yet included by design, and there is no explicit gender policy in India's Development Partnership Administration (DPA). We find that India is ready to embrace a more formal framework and structure, one where both men and women work together to ensure that the policies positively impact men, women and other marginalized groups equally. In her essay, Ms. Swati Prabhu outlines the relevance and importance of development as a tool of Indian Foreign Policy and elaborates on some instances in which gender mainstreaming is prevalent. The essay provides an overview of several projects with a gender dimension, and also highlights some gaps that could be filled with more proactive and targeted measures.

Emerging Non-Traditional Regional Challenges

India's geo-strategic importance has gained more relevance today as new and emerging challenges arise in the region. Shared regional and global resources and the management of them are often areas where national and human interest converge. Emerging challenges can encompass a wide spectrum of issues, from the use of shared water to the ethical application of technology or even our foray into space. The definition of non-traditional challenges is traditionally exclusionary and so the FFP approach here seeks to break away from the framing of traditional vs non-traditional security, to include women in the masculinised discourse. The Indian subcontinent is faced by war and border disputes, cross border insurgencies, refugee crises and political crises, where India needs to do much better in the region, across verticals and sectors: conflict relief and rehabilitation, strengthening the trust deficit in regional institutions, development and health cooperation, and cross-border trade. There is a need to consider more deeply the rationale, politics, impetus and ground up realities that should drive inclusive Indian foreign policy framework.

In their essay, Ms. Riya Sinha and Dr. Constantino Xavier make the case for centralising the role of women in non-traditional security policies in India's neighbourhood and South Asia. The essay highlights the rising importance of gendered considerations in South Asia's non-traditional security challenges, and explores how Indian foreign policy can include gender dimensions to empower women, and create a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Health

Health diplomacy has been a prominent feature of India's Foreign Policy; bilaterally as well as through regional mechanisms such as SAARC and the South-South Cooperation Fund, and India has often taken the lead on medical diplomacy. For example, India is a major exporter of medicines to countries in the neighbourhood as well as in Africa, often giving it the status of being a 'pharmacy of the world'. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, despite several odds against us, India had taken the lead to supply medicines and vaccines to the neighbourhood and beyond.

In her essay, Ms. Swagata Yadavar traces the role of India's health diplomacy in its foreign policy, focussing more specifically on the COVID-19 crisis, which she has tracked extensively as a journalist. The essay highlights the need to prioritise health security with a deeper focus on marginalised communities, and looks at how feminist policies can support this goal.

Regional and Global Trade

An economic crisis, be it the result of the pandemic or Russia's war with Ukraine or other financial meltdowns, disrupts global value chains and creates simultaneous demand shock. This brings to the fore deepening global contradiction, where power dynamics do not pursue shared interests, and foster competition rather than embrace collaboration. Ultimately some of the solutions rest at the centre of global trade discussions and how countries in the future might form new relationships, by choice or by necessity. As Canada and Sweden detail in their Feminist Trade Policy, women and men experience the effects of trade policies differently, and so gender must be a consideration by design. However, countries often sign on to global frameworks, but when it comes to implementation, considerations of national sovereignty are prioritized and thus there is very little space left for gender to be included. It is necessary therefore to build allies among those working within institutions, who could then include the gender lens within the overall agenda setting process. There is also space for advocacy on these issues within smaller groupings at the global level, using India's push for plurilateral institutions.

In their essay, Dr. Nisha Taneja, Ms. Sanjana Joshi, and Ms. Shravani Prakash make a case for gender mainstreaming in India's Free Trade Agreements, on the premise that it will enable greater economic empowerment for

women. There has been an uptick in both the number of FTAs signed and the number of gendered considerations in these agreements; however they are generally non-binding and non-mandatory, and require gender to be incorporated as a trade issue for women to reap the full benefits of free trade and open market access.

The Future of Multilateral Institutions

Gender is a visible feature in India's engagement in multilateral institutions. From deploying the first-ever all female police unit to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), to commitments on inclusivity and equality in more regional institutions such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association's (IORA) 'Balaclava Declaration'; the G20's national gender equality plans and strategies aimed at advancing the agenda of women at work; the BRICS Gender Forum 2018 and BRICS Dialogue on the future of work: Towards a women-led growth framework, 2021. In order that global processes be better informed by local cultures, economic and social realities, India's role in leading regional processes must represent a wide variety of stakeholders including the voice of stakeholders on the ground in informing the multilateral process. For even in the multilateral spaces where women do exist, they are often limited to peace building and peace talks.

In their essay, Professor Amitabh Mattoo and Ms. Dorothy Deb focus specifically on gender in the BRICS forum. They analyse ways in which gender can be mainstreamed at that level, highlighting avenues for India to pioneer gender-centric policymaking, and identifying roadblocks that prevent more sustained participation.

Way Forward

Across Asia there is hope for progress, as governments have invested in opening to women opportunities that were traditionally perceived to be "male only". For example, in Bangladesh and India, women in the defence forces can now participate in frontline combat units. We need to take our incremental victories on gender equity and ensure that they are reflected in our foreign policy. Perhaps the time is ripe for Asian leaders to begin discussions on crafting a gendered foreign policy that is uniquely Asian.

The FFP and similar gender mainstreaming approaches could provide the perspective required to help India prepare and deal with the uncertain nature of evolving challenges to human security in a manner that is inclusive and equitable. Additionally, as India expands its role as a development assistance partner to other countries, it has the opportunity to define a uniquely Indian approach for a gendered foreign policy, to translate gains made from national schemes and initiatives. There are opportunities for India to lead the South Asia perspective on feminist foreign policy, especially as it prepares to take on the G20 chair. India has the opportunity to adopt a proactive gendered approach and mainstreaming a gender focus in international development projects.

The essays in this compendium, contributed by experts from various fields, suggest that India would benefit from a gender mainstreaming approach or framework to its foreign policy and that it is ready to adopt a more formal structure. The trajectory of the FFP conversation encourages countries to take their context specific approach. This also opens the doors for India to foster closer ties with likeminded allies to develop the future of such a policy for the region as well as include some of the innovative thinking in its own approach.

In foreign policy, often national sovereignty is prioritised at the cost of gender inclusion, but that debate can be reframed to develop approaches that make considerations of gender an integral part of national sovereignty. We must shape the discourse to include wider perspectives on the understanding of foreign policy from the traditional security lens to include emerging challenges.

As the concept of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy evolves, we hope it provides an opportunity to bring greater diversity, especially from the perspective of the Global South, to imagine what it would look like from a wider geography and shape its impact. There is need for research and evidence building to guide the thinking on feminist foreign policy. This includes bridging data and evidence gaps to inform policies. We hope the compendium provides the tools to begin the dialogue to make India's foreign policy more gender inclusive.

Climate Change and Disaster Management

01.



India Needs a Gender-Responsive Climate Diplomacy

Dhanasree Jayaram¹

Introduction

The disproportionate effects of climate change on women as well as the underrepresentation of women in climate change-related decision-making processes are gradually being recognised as a form of climate injustice that requires to be addressed urgently. The introduction of the Gender Action Plan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2016 has led to greater acknowledgement of the need for ensuring women's participation in climate change-related decision-making and resulted in nation states adopting roadmaps to integrate gender into their respective climate actions. India also endorsed the action plan – highlighting a series of initiatives that the government has implemented (or is in the process of implementing) that are aimed at making national-level climate policies more gender-responsive. In the field of International Relations, both gender and environmental issues have long been considered peripheral security concerns. While this may have changed to some extent in the post-Cold War era, these issues continue to be marginalised in policy discourses. Climate diplomacy is defined as “the interface between national interest debates and international cooperation. It is the process through which nation states – and increasingly non-governmental and sub-state actors – determine and work to deliver their international objectives.”

²The gender component can infuse greater diversity and inclusivity in climate diplomacy. This is crucial in light of the worsening climate crisis and climate injustice. Yet there has been little effort to integrate gender

into climate diplomacy discourses and practices worldwide. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) that is central to climate diplomacy is one of the several ways in which equity and justice are being approached in global climate governance. Without addressing the role of gender in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and future climate action, implications of climate change for peace and security (such as for developing effective conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding efforts), and climate risk assessment amongst others, climate diplomacy will fall short on achieving its goals linked with international cooperation and multilateralism.

Why does Gender Matter to Climate Policy and Diplomacy?

The disproportionate effects of climate change on women (as a gender category) are increasingly being recognised and documented across the world, including developing countries. For instance, in India, climate change has in many cases disrupted traditional livelihoods. In Assam, climate change is linked with lower agricultural yields, reduced production of tea, declining Muga silk production, and so on, which triggers loss of livelihoods and rural-to-urban migration. Most often, it is the men that move to urban centres in search of employment opportunities, leaving the burden of running the houses on women.³ Women's vulnerabilities to climate change are exacerbated by the fact that they are burdened with being primary caregivers, collecting items for sustenance (firewood, water, etc.), maintaining the shelter, and so on. At times, women are forced to take up low-paying jobs to make ends meet, which require additional physical labour and exertion, that can also have a negative effect on their health.

Moreover, adolescent girls of these families are forced to leave schools to take up work and/or look after the elderly or younger children.⁴ In some cases, women are even becoming increasingly vulnerable to human trafficking as poverty and unemployment rise further.⁵ Water scarcity in particular garners attention as water collection for the household has traditionally been considered a woman's job due to the patriarchal notions of caregivers in the family attached to their identities. Hence, as the water crisis worsens due to wells and ponds (particularly in rural areas) drying up, women's vulnerability is further increased. They are forced to walk long distances to fetch water, which puts additional burden on them – affecting

their physical and mental health. Furthermore, they are also trapped in precarious spaces, as they lack access to safe environments and rights.⁶

Keeping in view the above-mentioned differentiated, gendered vulnerabilities, gender has gradually been integrated into several multilateral climate policy frameworks with sustained efforts. Apart from the 2016 Gender Action Plan, gender is also central to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. These emphasize the need for reducing gender disparities and mainstreaming a gender perspective in their implementation. A gender perspective, however, must also entail the representation of women leaders at all levels of decision-making, by not just including elite women networks, but also women from lower socioeconomic groups who are often left behind in gender mainstreaming processes, thereby necessitating a grassroots approach to climate diplomacy.

Gender mainstreaming through representation is often treated as “a tickbox bureaucratic exercise”, whereby more women are integrated into the existing institutional mechanisms dealing with climate change. Yet the institutions and policies follow a business-as-usual approach towards climate action that does not necessarily recognize and/or act upon women’s conditions and needs.⁷ Hence, **representation needs to go beyond numerical connotations to ensure intersectional inclusion (involving women from various backgrounds), and transformative action (structural and institutional changes)**. In fact, even increasing women’s numerical representation in policy-making mechanisms has been correlated with heightened public spending in women’s rights, education, child care, social welfare, public health, etc. in many countries⁸, which are critical to climate action policies too.

Governments have stressed that a rhetorical framework (as an after-thought to include gender in international climate action) alone will not be sufficient to improve the level of women’s participation, as gender disparity in decision-making is a symptom of a wider systemic issue. The need for capacity building, financial assistance, and other creative processes may help achieve a number balance, but the need to go beyond this goal and introduce a transformative approach that radically alters issues concerning “access and influence in global decision-

making spaces” has also been reiterated by many analysts.⁹ International frameworks such as the Gender Action Plan could therefore serve as a tool for advancing the overarching goal of transition from fossil fuels to more sustainable, just, and equitable pathways of development that safeguards women’s rights and promotes gender equality in a real sense. Even in policies related to just transition, women’s role cannot be ignored.

- At the 15th Conference of Parties (COP-15) in 2009 (Copenhagen Summit), only 32 percent of the national delegations were constituted by women, while in COP-25, the number rose to 39 percent.
- At the same time, the percentage of women heads of delegations increased from 10 percent in 2009 to 21 percent in 2019.¹⁰

While there is improvement, there is still a long way to go in terms of ensuring gender parity in the UNFCCC processes that the Gender Action Plan aims for. The 2021 Glasgow Summit (COP-26) witnessed a surge in women’s voices and concerns¹¹, but their access to decision-making powers continues to be considerably lower in comparison to men, especially when it comes to leading the delegations. In India’s case too, even though the number of women delegates has risen in recent years, the overall gender imbalance is evident (albeit accurate data could not be gathered for all the years). According to the provisional list of registered participants brought out by the UNFCCC ahead of COP-26, the number of women in the Indian delegation accounted for approximately 15 percent.¹²

Despite continued lower representation of women in comparison to men, the COP-26 saw many nation states committing to a gender-sensitive or gender-responsive climate action¹³.

- Canada was among the countries that committed to direct 80 percent of its climate investments over the next five years towards achieving gender equality¹⁴, in congruence with its Feminist International Assistance Policy. Hence, it would prioritise projects that target gender equality outcomes. Canada is also working towards developing a gender lens to climate risk finance and insurance in forums such as the InsuResilience Global Partnership.¹⁵
- Nigeria pledged to expand its National Gender and Climate Action plan by mainstreaming gender into policies in five sectors: “agriculture, forestry, and land use; food security and health; energy and transportation; waste management; and water and sanitation.”
- Bolivia has committed to support the leadership of women and girls in climate change and broader sustainable development initiatives – including indigenous, rural, and other marginalised women (DTE Staff 2021).
- Germany unveiled a Gender Strategy as a part of its International Climate Initiative, which aims to encourage “gender-transformative approaches” in cooperation on climate change and biodiversity protection (UN Women 2021).
- Bangladesh launched a Climate Change and Gender Action Plan in 2013 that aims to mainstream gender concerns into all policies, strategies, and initiatives concerning climate change – primarily focussing on food security, disaster management, infrastructure resilience, and low carbon development.¹⁶

These examples demonstrate the increasing level of commitment at the international level to mainstream gender through various initiatives in climate change policies. One could also argue that these international commitments gradually translate into national strategies as nation states are obligated to implement them domestically. It would be important for all countries to prioritise integrating a gender perspective into the work plan involving the implementation of the Paris Agreement through a gender strategy in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) submitted to the UNFCCC.

India's Climate Policy and its Gender Dimensions

India's climate vulnerabilities have worsened over the past few decades: During 1970–2005, India experienced 250 extreme climatic events; however, since 2005, it has faced 310. According to a recently published study¹⁷, over 75 percent of India's districts, consisting of more than 638 million people, have been identified as hotspots of climate-related extreme weather events, such as cyclones, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and cold waves. In recent decades, apart from the frequency and intensity of disasters, even the unpredictability has grown. In nearly 40 percent of Indian districts, there has been a noticeable shift in the pattern of extreme climatic events, with traditionally flood-prone areas becoming more drought-prone, and vice versa. In the coming years, India's vulnerabilities are expected to grow, with adverse gender implications. Hence, gender sensitization and responsiveness are critical to its climate policies.



1970–2005: 250 climatic events
35 years

2005–Present: 310 climatic events
17 years

Number of extreme climatic events experienced in India over the years

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the 17 SDGs set by the international community in 2015 represent a path for long-term progress that ‘leaves no one behind’. SDG 13 deals with climate action, wherein women’s contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation is recognized, and SDG 5 is dedicated to achieving gender equality in all spheres of the society. **India has attempted to imbibe the interconnected Sustainable Development Goals through its National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC) under various missions, released in 2008. Not only does the NAPCC acknowledge the disproportionate effects of climate change on women, particularly their health and the need for paying special attention to gender aspects in climate policy¹⁸, but also increasingly as the NAPCC gets expanded with new missions such as the one on climate change and human health, more emphasis is being laid on gender.** For example, the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, Anganwadi workers, helpers, and self-help groups that are constituted by women, play an important role in implementing policies concerning climate change and health at the local level. Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Ujwal Yojana that promotes the use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) as the primary source for cooking among rural women is regarded as a climate mitigation initiative as it contributes to energy transition.¹⁹

India’s disaster management policies also feature gender prominently. **Drawing upon its experiences as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, India has incorporated criteria to provide special care to the needs of women and children and prevent discrimination based on all grounds including gender.** Besides ensuring access to amenities during and after a disaster, policies also reflect the need for protection of women and girls from sexual violence, provision of physical and psychological care, as well as instituting action plans to mainstream gender within long-term disaster mitigation strategy. However, as reiterated by many scholars, the Sendai Framework itself is a missed opportunity when it comes to outlining actionable strategies for its implementation at different levels of governance.²⁰ Besides, in the Indian case, instead of combining all the vulnerable populations under one group, the role of women needs to be operationalised separately from children and the elderly to avoid infantilisation.

Gender-related issues are expressly acknowledged in India's subnational climate policies such as State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs), but operationalisation is far from satisfactory.

Most SAPCCs still frame women as vulnerable and not as actors and/or stakeholders in decision-making. Other reasons for the slow progress in gender mainstreaming within climate policy in India include: equating gender with women, without paying much heed to men's vulnerabilities; the lack of gender-disaggregated data on gender-based vulnerabilities; and lack of consideration of gender throughout the policy process.²¹

There are some exceptions such as in Kerala's SAPCC, institutional mechanisms ensure the appointment of a gender inclusion nodal person in every ministry, gender-sensitive budgetary allocation that also caters to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as monitoring and evaluation plans with respect to inclusion of gender aspects.²²

India seems to be indulging in more gender sensitive policy-making as it attempts to sensitise and create awareness about gender within the policy sphere instead of gender mainstreaming that mandates inclusion of women as actors. The adherence to viewing women solely as victims could be linked to the patriarchal social norms prevalent in India that demand women's presence in public sphere only as victims and not actors of change. Social and cultural norms have been instrumental in creating oppressive attitudes towards women in economic and political spheres, thereby having deep-rooted implications for foreign policy and diplomacy. While women are seen to actively engage in national politics today, with rising number of electoral candidates, representatives in parliaments, legislative assemblies, panchayats, and other governance bodies, their access to and influence in decision-making platforms is debatable despite increasing representation. An effective gender mainstreaming approach at the domestic level can strengthen India's climate diplomacy at the international level.

India's Climate Diplomacy and its Gender Dimensions

India has been an active player in the international climate order since the beginning of climate change negotiations, with stronger commitment to act on climate change taking shape in late 2000s, when it decided to declare voluntary emissions intensity reduction targets. India played a significant role in the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015. Its contribution to the establishment of the second commitment of the Kyoto Protocol was instrumental, through the 2012 Doha Amendment that was in the doldrums due to several countries, including the USA and Canada, refusing to sign and/or ratify it. Its climate diplomacy positions have been loaded with ideational concepts, values, and principles, including climate justice and equity. India has consistently demanded greater levels of commitment from the industrialised countries, not only in terms of emissions reduction, but also financial and technological assistance for developing countries. In its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) too, India has explicitly underscored the indispensability of climate finance to its climate action goals.²³

India is projecting itself as a responsible power, ready to take on climate commitments at the international level and to be seen as a part of the solution. At the 2021 Glasgow Summit, India committed to achieve the target of net zero emissions by 2070 as well as increase non-fossil fuel energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030. This approach is largely guided by the notion of co-benefits. For example, when seen through the gender lens, replacement of firewood (for cooking) with solar cook-stoves or other cleaner alternatives is aimed at climate mitigation, improving human health, and promoting women's empowerment.

As India strengthened its climate diplomacy over the years, it signed various agreements and entered into various arrangements to boost cooperation in various sectors. In fact, India has been the recipient of climate finance from various bilateral and multilateral funds. According to Climate Policy Initiative (CPI), India mobilised green finance flows amounting to US\$ 17 billion for the financial year 2017, and US\$ 21 billion in 2018 from domestic and international sources. While the power generation sector continues to be the primary recipient of these flows, transportation has also picked

up momentum in recent years.²⁴ More importantly, through development assistance, India has been channelling finances into climate mitigation and adaptation. However, at the domestic level, there is still a long way to go in terms of integrating climate and environmental concerns effectively into development planning. Considering that gender is also an essential element of development cooperation, it is natural to combine gender equality objectives with climate diplomacy.

What is also important to highlight here is that India has emerged as a provider of development assistance to many developing countries in Asia and Africa – focussing on “capacity building, concessional finance, technology sharing, grant, and trade.” It provided development assistance worth more than US\$ 8.5 billion to its partners from 2008 to March 2022.²⁵ As India supports other developing countries in disaster management/risk reduction, building resilient infrastructure, deploying renewable energy, it needs to take seriously the need for setting up an international development cooperation agency²⁶ with processes and guidelines for implementation, including on gender dimensions. This is particularly significant for the success of climate diplomacy towards its neighbouring countries with which it has established channels of development cooperation.

One of the biggest milestones in India’s climate diplomacy was the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in 2015, with its headquarters located in New Delhi. Its goal is to utilise clean, low-cost solar energy to help solar-rich countries become more energy secure and self-sufficient. It was quoted as “India’s gift to the world” by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who proactively brought together many countries to discuss best practices in solar energy technologies and their deployment as well as to provide subsidies (government-supported) to promote large-scale adoption of solar energy.²⁷

The ISA does not explicitly mention gender sensitivity, responsiveness, or mainstreaming. Yet it has been active in many ways in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. The ISA now supports the “Solar Mamas” programme run by Barefoot College in Ajmer, Rajasthan under Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), where women of sunshine countries are trained and equipped with the skills to make

and maintain solar panels. Interestingly, the ‘master trainers’ themselves are women from the locality belonging to less privileged backgrounds who were trained earlier by the college and are then chosen to impart their knowledge to women from the rest of the world.²⁸ Such initiatives are placed at the intersection of climate action and gender equality, and they need to be further strengthened to promote rural development and uplift women from poverty through appropriate incentives.

Another achievement of India in the realm of climate diplomacy is the launch of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) in 2019 with 22 member countries (as of 31 December 2021). In accordance with the SDGs, Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework, the CDRI seeks to assist countries in developing disaster and climate resilient infrastructure. Similar to the ISA, the CDRI also tends to focus on capacity-building, mobilisation of finance, innovation, technology, etc.²⁹ The CDRI also does not explicitly have a gender policy, but there have been calls for integration of gender into it, keeping in view the gender-specific vulnerabilities associated with climate change-related disasters. **In the absence of any formal guidelines in terms of gender responsiveness and/or mainstreaming, it becomes difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of India’s approach towards this issue in the realm of climate diplomacy. This requires to be remedied for greater legitimacy in the international climate order.** This is also critical to long-term efficacy of its climate diplomacy efforts that are essentially targeted at enhancing people’s well-being.

Gender and Climate Diplomacy: Examples from the Rest of the World

The European Union (EU) has instituted some policies to mainstream gender within its climate diplomacy efforts. “Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realising gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.”³⁰ As the EU also integrates climate and environmental change into foreign policy and development cooperation, it has outlined certain guidelines to carry out gender quality-impact assessments,

reduce gender-differentiated effects of climate change, and introduce reforms by which women could have equal access to economic resources, inheritance, land ownership, financial services, natural resources, etc.³¹

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy has been one of the major game-changers in climate change-related development cooperation. Some of the areas that Canada is focussing on include supporting women to improve crop resilience and water access, enhance women's participation in climate-related decision-making, assist women to cover weather-related losses, provide equal access to technologies, increase employment and business opportunities in sectors such as renewable energy. Canada is boosting targeted investments, gender-sensitive budgeting, advocacy, and innovation with the aim of reducing gender inequality and increasing women's access to opportunities in the field of climate change.³² At COP-26, Canada took the lead by declaring that it would quadruple its climate investment to US\$ 5.3 billion over the next five years, with 80 percent of the amount directed towards achieving gender equality outcomes. In addition, along with Convergence Finance, Canada also established a CAD\$ 5 million Gender-Responsive Climate Finance Design Funding Program, which will provide grants to develop new blended finance solutions that address both climate change and gender as well as attract large-scale private sector investment into these interlinked, mutually converging goals.³³

What can India do?

India could emulate other countries' examples to develop a framework of gender-responsive climate diplomacy for better integration of gender-related concerns into all climate policies at various levels of governance. Gender needs to be represented in projects and initiatives supported or aided by India in other countries in all stages: programming, identification and formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Through the NAPCC, aspects of gender can be incorporated and strengthened within all the missions. Similarly, the Apex Committee for Implementation of Paris Agreement could recommend the inclusion of gender in the action plan on achieving its NDCs as well as delineate guidelines for gender mainstreaming through a series of steps, including gender budgeting.

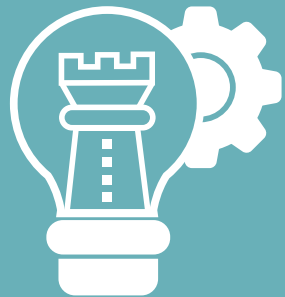
At the subnational level, beyond the recognition of women as victims of climate change, state and local governments should bring about policies that can empower women to participate effectively in adaptation planning and other decision-making processes.

Can India build a framework of gender-responsive climate diplomacy, which could potentially advance its interests in South Asia and beyond? India has positioned itself as a responsible power that aspires to be acknowledged as a global climate leader. With its recent climate commitments including a net zero target (pledged to be fulfilled by 2075, contingent on international financial assistance) and other initiatives such as the ISA, India has stepped up its climate diplomacy in recent years. It has also intensified its efforts to build climate partnerships with other developing countries as well as least developed countries through tangible measures such as renewable energy cooperation, in which gender often finds a place, albeit in a fragmented manner. However, a formal gender mainstreaming strategy can provide greater legitimacy to India's climate diplomacy efforts at the regional and global levels. This would also necessitate a more gender-inclusive approach to climate policy at the national level.

“ Without addressing the role of gender in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and future climate action, implications of climate change for peace and security (such as for developing effective conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding efforts), and climate risk assessment amongst others, climate diplomacy will fall short on achieving its goals linked with international cooperation and multilateralism.

Development Cooperation and Assistance

02.



Mainstreaming Gender in India's Development Partnerships

Swati Prabhu

Introduction

Development cooperation or partnership has gained significant ground in recent times, particularly in the context of the emerging economies, such as India. There is growing consensus that it plays a critical role in shaping a country's foreign policy³⁴, contributing towards its line of actions, functions and instruments³⁵. The occurrence of collaborations, coalitions and 'strategic partnerships'³⁶ between the developed and developing economies as well as amongst the developing actors is also gradually changing the face of contemporary North-South geopolitics. This is reiterated by India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, wherein "India's 'energetic diplomacy' goes hand-in-hand with the international order characterised by convergences and issue-based arrangements".³⁷ Reflecting a shift in the traditional donor-recipient model dominated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development -Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) members³⁸, development partnerships now underscore the reality of 'development diplomacy'; diplomacy that is focused on furthering the larger goal of development. In fact, development-oriented cooperation, cutting across borders and sectors, is a shared priority which can be unpacked through the sustainability narrative. This is exemplified by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, laying emphasis on building capacities and nurturing a collaborative stance for encouraging global partnership for Agenda 2030³⁹.

However, given the far-reaching effects of the ongoing pandemic, sustainable development has been deeply impacted, reversing the progress achieved so far⁴⁰. In such a scenario, international cooperation becomes a pivotal force in ensuring access to the global public goods (GPGs)⁴¹. For instance, as per a recent study, Covid-19 has multiplied the regressive effect on SDG 5⁴², exacerbating the existing gender inequalities in the society⁴³. This is illustrated poignantly in a majority of the developing countries (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Impact of Covid-19 on SDG5
Source: Committee for Development Policy

Taking the case of India’s development partnerships, this essay attempts to understand how gender has been mainstreamed (or not) in its cooperation model over the years. Using the lens of the SDGs, it identifies specific projects and programmes undertaken by New Delhi’s development cooperation arm, under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) i.e., the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) in developing regions of South Asia, Africa and the Pacific, its budget allocations and impact in achieving the target of SDG 5. It finds that although India has been contributing towards enhancing women’s participation in different sectoral areas, it is not an explicit policy choice where gender is included intentionally by design. Rather, it emerges as a default policy option whereby its programmes and projects indirectly factor in gender considerations. By exploring the necessity of ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a gendered approach towards development cooperation, the essay aims to facilitate the expansion of India’s development-focused diplomacy interlinked with the foreign policy conversation at a geostrategic level. Finally, it draws some key lessons on gender mainstreaming from other countries and their development cooperation agencies, such as Canada, USA, European Union (EU), Japan, and Mexico.

Gender and Development Partnership Administration (DPA)

Established in 2012 as Development Partnership Administration (DPA) under the aegis of the MEA, Government of India, New Delhi's current development partnership structure is primarily 'demand-driven with no strings attached conditionality'⁴⁴. Given its own history of being a developing country, it has been engaged in building effective partnerships with developing countries- both in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond, long before it gained independence in 1947. The first chronicled example is a fellowship programme for trainees from China and Indonesia, instituted in September 1946 by the then interim government. Moreover, India's strength lies in sharing its developmental experience with other partner countries in the Global South paving the path for a new developmental framework.

Broadly, there are three pillars of India's development interventions: a) Lines of Credit (LOCs), b) Grant-in-Aid and c) Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance, popularly known as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme⁴⁵. Evidently, its commitment towards sustainable development has been rather organic in nature than policy-driven⁴⁶. This can be observed, particularly in India's partnerships around the neighbourhood during the early 1950s. Although indirect, it contributed towards a majority of the sustainability targets. For instance, in Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Bhutan, the projects facilitated capacity-building and technical training (SDG 17) under ITEC in various sectoral areas, such as education (SDG 4) and health (SDG 3). It also provided infrastructural support (SDG 9) to these nations in the form of constructing hydropower plants, roadways, and transportation links, thereby opening up new markets for trade. Notably, over the years its development assistance commitment has also increased significantly, making it a fundamental actor in the global aid architecture. For instance, in 2019-2020, India allocated about INR 7,662.79cr as grants and loans marking a significant jump in the 2018-2019 commitment which stood at INR 5,375cr⁴⁷. During the pandemic, India's vaccine diplomacy through 'Vaccine Maitri' made further inroads by bolstering its position as 'the first responder in emergency situations' in global geopolitics⁴⁸.

On SDG 5, India's DPA is involved in several bilateral and multilateral programmes, facilitating gender equality and women empowerment cutting across sectors of energy, business, agriculture, infrastructure etc. Its development partnership endeavours concerning gender are also illustrated at the multilateral forums, such as the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, G20, India Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation etc. Table 1 on the next page summarises some of the major development partnership initiatives undertaken by India on SDG 5, either bilaterally, multilaterally or through a triangular set-up with other development agencies in the developing regions.

| Initiative | Objective |
|---|--|
| e-ITEC Courses | Women empowerment |
| Self-Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) Afghan Women's Empowerment Programme | To train more than 3,000 Afghan women in vocational and marketing skills for achieving economic self-sufficiency ⁵¹ |
| Feed the Future | Developing local supply chains to promote poor and small farm holders' access to agro-technologies, thereby strengthening women's participation in productive economic activities |
| India-Kenya Dairy Innovation Bridge Programme | Strengthening profitable smallholder milk value chains by encouraging women dairy producer groups and cooperatives by giving easy access to technologies, market, capacity-building, knowledge and resources |

| Partners | Target Country | Period |
|--|--------------------------|-----------|
| Bankers Institute of Rural Development (BIRD), Lucknow National Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development (NIESBUD), Noida ⁵⁰ | All developing countries | 2020-2021 |
| The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and India | Afghanistan | 2015-2017 |
| USAID and India | Nepal | 2016 |
| USAID and India | Kenya | 2015 |

| Initiative | Objective |
|--|---|
| India-UN Development Partnership Fund | Providing economic livelihood skills training to 150 mothers and raise awareness about sexual and gender-based violence among 150 adolescent girls through sexual and reproductive health education |
| India-UN Development Partnership Fund | Gender mainstreaming by reducing the gender gap in society, ensuring their basic rights and access to management of water and sanitation |
| India, Brazil and South Africa Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation (IBSA Fund) ⁵² | Empowering rural women by scaling up the rocket-stove project (i.e., clean energy transition) |
| IBSA Fund ⁵³ | Eliminating child marriages and offering scholarships to child-marriage survivors |

| Partners | Target Country | Period |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------|
| India and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Liberia | Liberia | 2017-2020 |
| India and Government of Federated States of Micronesia | Federated States of Micronesia | 2020-2023 |
| India, Brazil, South Africa and Government of Fiji & its agencies | Fiji | 2017-2021 |
| India, Brazil, South Africa, Governments of Malawi & Zambia, African Union Commission | Malawi and Zambia | 2019-2020 |

Table 1: India's Development Partnership Projects on SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

Source: Author's own using data from MEA, IBSA, India-UN Development Partnership Fund and USAID

Here, it is important to note that gender is not a standalone issue but a crosscutting factor, a collective priority shared by all targets of sustainable development. Although these programmes underscore the existence of a gender element, a dedicated, separate pillar on gender in the DPA is absent. Similarly, India's development cooperation model has not instituted a separate pillar for sustainable development where SDG 5 is considered as a decisive target towards attainment of Agenda 2030.

Importance of Mainstreaming Gender in India's Development Partnerships

While projects undertaken by India through the various initiatives have significantly impacted global aid and opened alternative avenues of financing⁵⁴, there is a continuing need for reflection on the policy design and technical understanding of gender as a crosscutting issue. This is reflected in the statement made by India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar at the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) Academic Forum in 2021 that "Prime Minister Modi's appeal for a human-centric globalisation is closely related to the broader inequities, that existed way before the pandemic entered the global scene"⁵⁵. In order to fulfil its goals of achieving 'development through diplomacy', India's development cooperation should not only emphasise but also put into practice its 'human-centric' aspect. Increasing social resilience of the communities is a long-term strategic goal that India's development cooperation must accentuate. This includes the aspect of promoting women's rights, their interests and creating parity between men and women across platforms. **In other words, a human-rights based development cooperation planning towards closing the gender gap should be key. Since most of the programmes and projects undertaken by Indian DPA targets gender by default, it is essential to streamline gender objectives, right from scratch, by design.** This would depend majorly on decision-making ability of the policymakers, having a direct impact on the development outcomes. For example, tackling the challenge of green transition (SDG 7) through capacity-building (SDG 17) of the local communities in Fiji is directly connected with enhancing women's well-being and their economic opportunities (SDG 5).

Moreover, the process of understanding ‘how’ and ‘why’ of gender considerations in the context of development interventions⁵⁶ should be adequately addressed. It has been noted that the potential contribution of the female population towards boosting economic growth has largely remained undervalued and underutilised⁵⁷. Taking a gender dimension in development cooperation is connected with socio-economic progress, on a long-term scale. One of the top-most aspects of sustainability stems from investing in human capital, one of the ways being incorporating them in the development cooperation strategy. The operating norms and principles, collectively and globally agreed upon by the actors would also come into play here. The sustainable development agenda, for example, lays down gender equality as a holistic and interconnected goal to be realised across the other SDG targets. This answers the ‘why’ of a gendered development cooperation.

The ‘how’ aspect of mainstreaming gender in development cooperation is possible through a transparent and effective policy dialogue between the various stakeholders on the commonly identified priorities of the partner country. It would also depend on the programming aspect by which the set priorities are to be fulfilled (for example, implementation schemes, financial allocation, trade-related factors, economic agreements etc.). Another vital aspect of gender mainstreaming in development interventions through policy dialogue is not only about equal representation of women but also involving men in the entire process. This would be positively beneficial for both men and women and also the marginalised sections of the society. Moreover, impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation of the initiatives is a crucial aspect of any development cooperation activity. The MEA does have a Performance Dashboard in place but it lacks indicators or an assessment framework. If India’s DPA is to adopt a ‘gendered’ approach to development cooperation, gender disaggregated data is important. For instance, what percentage of the INR 6,778.95cr allocated by Indian DPA as grants and loans for 2021-22 actually went towards women’s empowerment? A variety of courses offered through ITEC could also be examined from a gender-inclusive lens, highlighting the participation and involvement of women trainees in the developing countries. At present, this is starkly missing. This, in turn, would help in defining indicators and measuring performance of the development interventions focussing more on gender. Releasing more in-depth statistical data and articles

on gender mainstreaming could further facilitate in shaping the public discourse on this topic.

Furthermore, a country's development cooperation aspirations are reflective of its national interests or a larger understanding of the governance strategy. In a country like India, at a national level, gender-inclusive policies do not come through an easy process. It involves a series of negotiations and bargaining from civil society, local agencies and other non-state actors. This also impacts India's broader cooperation priorities at a multilateral platform. The first G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment held in 2021, is a case in point. Agreeing to closely and mutually cooperate with the G20 countries on enhancing gender parity and women-centric issues, India joined the 'Gender Equality Ministers of the G20' and highlighted the domestic initiatives undertaken by the government 'towards fighting gender equality and strengthening women's safety and security'⁵⁸. Additionally, Indian DPA's ongoing capacity-building programmes, such as the ITEC courses on thematic areas of sustainable agriculture, cyber technologies or climate change would greatly benefit if implemented from a gender-inclusive lens. Having said that, women's participation is not absent in these programmes; however, a focused gender approach would provide the much-needed leverage for India's development cooperation model for meeting the broader sustainable goals. Moreover, laying down a set of performance indicators, specifically based on a gender plank would offer a formidable foundation for gender mainstreaming in its ongoing engagements.

Lessons for India's DPA from other Development Agencies

The Indian DPA policymakers and institutional structure could possibly take some essential cues from other countries and their development partner agencies. For instance, Canada has now included gender under its assistance policy i.e., Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, focusing on 'effective and productive partnerships to advance the interests of women and girls which should no longer be restricted to government-to-government relationships'⁵⁹. Its stance as a feminist donor also pertinently emphasises that to achieve the ultimate goal of

poverty eradication, empowerment of women and girls and promotion of gender equality is the most effective approach. The policy, incorporating gender into six core action areas, illustrates the interrelatedness of global challenges where empowering women sits at the heart of these issues.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of UK has adopted the Strategic Vision on Gender Equality, where gender is one of the important global key performance indicators⁶⁰. It underlines the need for a sustained focus on existing commitments for girls and women, especially in conflict and crisis; and a greater focus on ensuring no girl or woman is left behind, including those with disabilities. It demands a more effective response on gender equality across the board, contributing to accelerated delivery of all the SDGs, and development and humanitarian outcomes.

The European Union (EU), released a new 'Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III)'⁶¹. It aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard gains made on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action. Emphasising on measuring results, GAP III is unique as it adopts a new approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning, with a stronger focus on measuring results. It also mentions that the Union will set up quantitative, qualitative and inclusive monitoring systems to increase public accountability, and ensure transparency and access to information on its assistance to gender equality worldwide. The Commission, in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), will monitor progress each year on the implementation of GAP III. It is interesting to note here that the action plan explicitly talks about 'promoting a transformative and intersectional approach, and mainstreaming gender in all policies and actions'. With the renaming of the Division on development cooperation as International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner, argued that "stronger engagement on gender equality is key to a sustainable global recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and building fairer, more inclusive, more prosperous societies. Women and girls are in the frontline of the pandemic and must be put in the driving seat of the recovery. As a gender-sensitive and responsive geopolitical Commission, the aim is to work more closely with individual Member States and partners, in building a truly gender-equal world." Additionally, the Union has devised a separate guide on gender mainstreaming in the EU policies, named the

'EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming'. Although it does not specifically deal with development partnerships, it considers gender mainstreaming as an essential tool, a strategy for quality improvement. It states how 'it enhances the quality of the programmes/initiatives and enables one to reach the target audience, their needs and expectations with greater accuracy'. Interestingly, EU also lays emphasis on indicators for measuring or monitoring the achievements of the development projects undertaken by an agency or programme. Giving precedence to gender mainstreaming, the Union has also set an overall target of reaching 85 per cent as part of its external actions.

Another example is Japan's Initiative on Gender and Development' through its official development assistance policy⁶². Announced in 2011, Japan has been quite forthright in its stance towards 'promoting and supporting the efforts of the developing countries for greater gender equality'. One of the major highlights of the policy relates to 'understanding the differences between men and women in their conditions of lives and needs, during the implementation stage'. This explicitly underscores the integration of a 'gendered' perspective at every step of the implementation phase of its development cooperation. Further, focusing on building capacities of the developing countries towards instituting national mechanisms and development of laws and system, Japan's development cooperation prioritises a gendered approach in areas of poverty reduction, sustainable growth, environment and human rights, conflict prevention etc.⁶³ This crosscutting gender equality perspective could serve as an essential lesson for India's DPA for fulfilling its long-term sustainability goalposts.

Although relatively new to the development cooperation landscape, the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) is engaged in development partnerships through the South-South Cooperation (SSC) framework, in Latin America and Caribbean regions⁶⁴. Officially, it has not mainstreamed gender in its policy initiatives, but its collaborative efforts with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is a key point. Focussed on the institutional strengthening of AMEXCID, one of the key areas of this capacity building project (2016-2020) run by BMZ was integration of gendered perspectives into projects, programmes and activities of Mexican cooperation for enhancing gender equality⁶⁵.

Conclusion

India's development partnerships have had a significant impact on furthering the development endeavours of several partner countries, in Asia and Africa, long before 1947. Its contributions in the field of women empowerment has been noteworthy, however, these initiatives have come about automatically and not as a specified policy option with an intent or purpose. Mainstreaming gender in India's DPA is a missing element requiring urgent attention. Given the rise in gender inequalities and the pressure of work and care on women during the pandemic, this area presents a canvass of interconnected challenges having a deep impact on the overall goal of sustainable development. With several developed and developing countries leaning towards a 'gender-just' development policy, India needs to put gender as a cross cutting issue, at the heart of its DPA policymaking. Fostering a robust development cooperation framework by purposefully integrating gender considerations in its policy-making, India could possibly help in building social resilience, an inclusive society and putting in place an effective social protection system, establishing a unique model of its own in the run up to Agenda 2030.

“*A human-rights based development cooperation planning towards closing the gender gap should be the key. Since most of the programmes and projects undertaken by Indian DPA targets gender by default, it is essential to streamline gender objectives, right from the scratch, by design.*”

Emerging Non-Traditional Regional Challenges

03.



Making Gender Central to India's Non-Traditional Security in South Asia

Constantino Xavier and Riya Sinha⁶⁶

Introduction / Abstract

South Asia is the most challenging area for India to pursue a more inclusive and gender-sensitive foreign policy. Marked by recurrent wars, border disputes and militarization, this region has been prone to hard security approaches, with states driven by high threat perceptions. The neighbourhood is one of India's foreign policy-making areas where diplomacy overlaps and coexists with military, police and intelligence organisations. These entities have exceptional influence on the ground, whether it is to patrol borders or control the flow of goods and people.

India's traditional state-driven, centralised, and securitized approach to a competitive and conflictual environment is one of the reasons why South Asia remains one of the world's least developed, integrated and connected regions. The predominantly hard security dimension in New Delhi's neighbourhood policy also explains why, despite its central role in the region, India has not been able to play a more influential role in fostering South Asia's economic development or institutionalizing multilateral cooperation.

Based on some of our research findings on South Asia, our article examines how Indian interests in the region could benefit from a more feminist, gender-sensitive approach to non-traditional security issues.

We discuss the rising importance that gender plays in South Asia's non-traditional security challenges and briefly examine six areas where Indian foreign policy could help empower women for a more peaceful and prosperous region.

Women and non-traditional security in India's neighbourhood

The scope of what constitutes "security" is expanding with an increasing focus on non-traditional security (NTS) issues. The Consortium on Non-Traditional Security Studies in Asia defines NTS as "those challenges that affect the survival and well-being of people and states that arise primarily out of non-military sources, such as climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, famine, people smuggling, drug trafficking and transnational crime."⁶⁷ However, there is a lack of consensus among states about what constitutes traditional security and NTS threats. For instance, energy is a part of Japan's traditional security concerns and policy agenda.⁶⁸

While traditional and non-traditional security challenges are often studied as binaries, there is a grey area within which both dimensions overlap. These binaries have led to a neglect in the study of other angles such as gender. Behera (2004) highlighted that the traditional conception of security effectively makes it synonymous with "citizenship," however, the latter is, historically and conceptually, not a gender-neutral phenomenon.⁶⁹ Hans (2016) observes that the insertion of gender rights as human rights in the peace and security discourse has remained on the margins.⁷⁰

There are several reasons why NTS, and its ensuing impact on foreign policy, should be studied from a feminist perspective. Lobaz (2009) notes that feminists identify the ethical and pragmatic grounds for broadening the analytical focus from states to people⁷¹. From a South Asian perspective, former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao has underscored the need for a feminist approach in the region:

"A feminist foreign policy would embrace the idea of a South Asian Commons...It would exercise vetoes to block war, not peace; it would emphasise the right to food, the right to health, the right to knowledge and learning, the right to reject the disconnects, the

worn clichés and mental barriers that divide us. It would weigh the interests of humanitarianism against the interests of power with far greater precision and wisdom.”⁷²

Rao’s vision is informed by the region’s conflictual past and India’s conventional responses to it. India’s traditional policies in South Asia have been dominated by a hard security approach, reflecting the volatile and fractious history of the subcontinent. The last 70 years have witnessed five wars, four between India and Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999) and one between India and China (1962). In addition, South Asian border disputes flare up cyclically, affecting the free flow of people and goods and resulting in highly securitised borderlands.⁷³

The many partitions of the region, and decades of economic insulation, have shaped India’s approach to be driven by hard security concerns, predominantly through the use of military, police, intelligence, and other political instruments to manage bilateral relations with neighbours. Furthermore, the conflicting domestic and foreign policy priorities of South Asian nations also play a role in the increasing emphasis on hard security, especially with China’s growing engagements in South Asia.⁷⁴

India’s securitised regional approach in South Asia contrasts with the transformative innovations of Indian diplomacy at the global level, where its behaviour has been far more progressive. For example, India has taken a proactive role in supporting the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women in developing sustainable peace and security efforts. In 2007, India deployed the first all-women police mission for peacekeeping efforts in Liberia. Recently, India also participated in the sixth India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Women’s Forum meeting, a tripartite dialogue forum of democracies.⁷⁵

In trend with these global efforts, our essay argues that India now faces a window of opportunity to also develop a feminist foreign policy in South Asia, with new regional initiatives to address NTS and move away from the traditional security paradigm. While it is easier for the Indian foreign policy establishment to apply a feminist approach at multilateral forums or towards distant Latin American and African countries, the true test of its commitment and capacity lies in its own neighbourhood, in South Asia. One of the challenges will be for the Indian state to work more closely

with its civil society, where women-focused organisations have a long history of finding innovative ways to push for cross-border and regional initiatives to cooperate for peace and development. On this feminist legacy in bypassing inter-state relations to mitigate conflicts, Gopinath and Manchanda (2019) recall a few important examples:

“Across the militarised and masculinised Pakistan–India border, women engaging in bus diplomacy have transgressed the dominant national security discourse and visited the other, humanising “the enemy.” Dialogues across fault lines within and across borders have explored the possibility of building a transversal politics. Multiple regional and subregional networks of women have shared and forged common strategies—for example, Naga women interacting with Sri Lankan peace activists; and women from the Chittagong Hill Tracts [Bangladesh] and the Naga hills have discussed their conflict resolution accords. Women have worked regionally to contribute to the global WPS [Women, Peace and Security] agenda.”⁷⁶

Among several other traditionally marginalised actors and factors, the role of women serves as a crucial test to assess India’s ability to transform its regional policies. This article aims to bridge the knowledge gap on the intersections between gender, NTS and Indian foreign policy in South Asia. We assess six different indicators of India’s foreign policy in South Asia: regional institutions, refugees, conflict relief and rehabilitation, development cooperation, cross-border trade, and health cooperation. These indicators, primarily socio-economic in nature, are some of the biggest non-military challenges that India and the other South Asian countries face in the region. These NTS issues can also lead to societal instability and pose a threat to security. For instance, the lack of gender parity in representation in multilateral institutions aggravates security dilemma; the absence of an asylum law leaves both India and the refugee community vulnerable to security threats; limiting women’s access to economic resources through formal trade can lead to a rise in informal practices, and inadequate attention to providing focussed medical services to women and minorities leaves them at risk for higher morbidity. In line with the compendium’s objective to push for a more feminist Indian foreign policy, we suggest possible ways forward in different sectors for a more inclusive policy-making that centralises gender in these six areas.

Regional Institutions

Multilateralism is an important instrument to centralise the role of women to raise developmental solutions or mitigate conflict and security dilemmas. In South Asia, however, regional cooperation suffers from a stark institutional deficit, as illustrated by the stagnation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), since 2016.

India's regional cooperation policies are afflicted by a dual limitation. Given that India's diplomatic, military and security establishments remain largely male-dominated, it is difficult to expect them to conceive of, champion and implement a more feminist foreign policy towards its neighbours. At the same time, while India may often seek to lead regional cooperation efforts, its central and predominant role in South Asia tends to fuel anxiety among its smaller neighbours, often paradoxically aggravating their security dilemmas. By reviving the role of women in regional institutions, India can address both these limitations and help overcome South Asian states' traditional emphasis on hard security and power politics.

For thirty years, SAARC played a pioneering role for women to shape regional development and security dialogues. This includes numerous initiatives, including the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child (1991) and SAARC ministerial conferences on women. However, with the marginalisation of SAARC since 2016, these women-centric initiatives have stalled, leaving an institutional void.

While India may have geostrategic and security concerns about Pakistan, it must find a way to take SAARC's South Asian cooperative feminist legacy forward and deepen it. New Delhi should ensure that SAARC's women-centric development initiatives are insulated from the bilateral context. There are several initiatives requiring urgent attention. For instance, the Women's Committee of the Association of SAARC Speakers and Parliamentarians met only twice since its inception in 2010. The regional Task Force to implement the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002) has failed to make progress. After meeting every one or two years since the 1980s, the SAARC Technical Committee on Women, Youth and Children has not reconvened since 2015. The SAARC Gender Policy Advocacy Group has also failed to meet annually after its first meeting, in 2015.

While New Delhi should do all it can to revive these initiatives, this does not preclude it from also fostering feminist policies on other regional platforms. In 2018, Prime Minister Modi called for a “special forum for BIMSTEC women MPs [Members of Parliament]”.⁷⁷ The Bangladesh-based organisation has adopted a new Charter, which should help in pursuing a strong gender-sensitive component.

There are also more flexible, less formal regional cooperative platforms where India can push for women-centric policies. India could initiate a non-governmental gender and development dialogue under the BBIN Initiative, with women champions from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. This would complement the BBIN’s inter-governmental track with a civil society, women-led component to foster sub-regional cooperation. Finally, no South Asian gender dialogue can be held in isolation from important initiatives at the global level. UN Women and UNESCAP have been actively involved in SAARC in the past, and other partners like ASEAN, Japan, Australia or the European Union could play an important role in supporting regional development through more gender-sensitive policies.

Refugees

India has been one of South Asia’s safe havens, attracting refugee populations from almost all of its neighbouring countries. As the recent cases of Afghanistan and Myanmar illustrate, regional conflicts will continue to displace people, forcing India to take political decisions about whom to grant asylum and on what grounds. Women comprise of a large part of India’s refugee population, making this also a gendered policy challenge.

Together with children, women are not only the first to usually be displaced, but also the most exposed to different risks, while fleeing conflicts and persecution, crossing into, and then living in India. Women refugees in India often find themselves “alone in a foreign land without a voice” subject to isolation, discrimination, exploitation and violence in patriarchal communities.⁷⁸

While India lacks an asylum law, as the largest recipient of refugees in the region it can take a number of steps to place its policies within a feminist framework. First, at the multilateral level, India can play a more proactive role in the implementation process of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), which it signed in 2018 and puts unprecedented emphasis on the role of women. As the GCR evolves institutionally, India must continue to work at the United Nations and other international organisations to overcome the remaining gender-blind dimensions in international law.⁷⁹ The GCR offers India the possibility to engage the World Bank and other international financial institutions to attract grants, credits and other economic assistance to spur development and inclusive growth with a gender dimension.⁸⁰

Second, by signing on to the GCR's programme of action, India pledged to "implement policies and programmes to empower women and girls in refugee and host communities, and to promote full enjoyment of their human rights, as well as equality of access to services and opportunities."⁸¹ One concrete way would be to extend greater support to women refugee community organisations already based in India, which face a variety of legal and financial challenges. Tamil, Burmese and Tibetan women exiled in India often find themselves in no-woman's land, forgotten and pushed around by different ministries and bureaucracies.⁸²

Finally, India could also invest in gender-sensitising training programs for government organisations that interact with refugees. This begins with the consular staff at India's diplomatic mission in South Asia, involved in assessing asylum requests by women, often due to gender discrimination or violence. At India's borders, especially overland, officials of the Bureau of Immigration, the armed forces or paramilitary organisations are the first to meet women refugees. Once inside India, refugees face a multitude of domestic institutions, including central and state ministries, the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO), the civil services and judicial authorities. At each of these levels, India must ensure that its infrastructure, processes and officials are prepared to address the specific needs and interests of women refugees.

Conflict Relief and Rehabilitation

India has a long history of providing emergency assistance to its neighbours, including in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and, more recently, the Rakhine conflict in Myanmar. As a regional “first responder”, India’s ambition is to be more prepared to help other countries face natural calamities and recover from them.⁸³ But India’s response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake also shows that rather than just showing up first, it is important to tailor rescue efforts to different populations and sensibilities. This includes critical decisions about different types of relief and modes of distribution, especially when host governments are stressed or incapacitated.

In conflicts or emergency situations, women face specific disadvantages, often leaving them at the margins of the relief and rehabilitation process. The first step is for India to be more gender-sensitive when deciding on what kind of relief it decides to allocate during a crisis. From food to clothing and medical assistance, India must have the technical know-how to ensure that its emergency assistance addresses the specific needs of women.

In situations of active conflict, as for example during the final year of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2008-09, India also deploys medical staff and field hospitals abroad. In such situations, Indian response teams should include a significant number of women doctors and nurses to serve the specific needs of women, who are the predominant beneficiaries of such medical services during active conflict. As the only all-women corps in the Indian Armed Forces, the Indian Military Nursing Service could be more rapidly and frequently deployed in such emergency theatres.

Finally, beyond immediate relief, India will also have to tailor its post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction phase to be more responsive to the needs of women. For example, in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar, India has been financing post-disaster housing schemes. It is important for India to ensure in consultation with the host government that women are not discriminated against in the allocation of property titles.

As one of the world’s most disaster-prone regions, South Asia will also have to invest significantly in preventive disaster management and risk reduction through capacity building, both at home and abroad. In 2016, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi emphasised that India needs to “encourage greater involvement and leadership of women in disaster risk management” given that “women are disproportionately affected by disasters.”⁸⁴

The challenge will be for India to adapt the gender-centric measures of its National Disaster Management Policy (NDMP, revised in 2019), to its regional policy. The NDMP notes that “relief and recovery needs of women and girls tend to be overlooked because the disaster management is almost entirely male dominated”.⁸⁵ It is thus important for India to lead by example by having a strong gender component in its foreign capacity building programs on disaster management, part of its development partnerships with neighbours. For instance, the newly established and India-led Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure could include a strong gender and diversity policy track.

Development cooperation

India’s development cooperation program is growing both institutionally and with neighbouring countries. South Asian countries receive the largest share of assistance. In 2020-21, approximately 76 percent of India’s total external grants and loans – approximately INR 3,867 crores (US\$ 553 million) – was extended to neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.⁸⁶ India has also expanded the scope of its development cooperation to include small development projects (High Impact Community Development Programme, HICDP), humanitarian assistance, cultural and heritage conservation, and new guidelines for its lines of credit. As India’s development programme grows, gender equality must become a policy objective.

Several examples from India’s HICDP in the neighbouring countries exemplify the need for a feminist approach and bridging the gender gap in the development process. For instance, of India’s 84 small development projects in Afghanistan (pre-2021), only two were focussed on women’s capacity building: a vocational training centre in Bagh-e-Zanana and construction of a gynaecology clinic in Nangarhar.⁸⁷ Similarly, in Sri Lanka, out of 36 HICDP projects in recent years, only one was focussed on empowerment of women.⁸⁸ However, during renewal of the HICDP, in December 2020, India

announced broadening the base of the project to include empowerment of women, child welfare and facilitation of community life, etc.⁸⁹ Nepal, paints a relatively better picture. India has been involved in building women-centric healthcare infrastructure in rural areas, including building a maternity ward within the Sagarmatha Zonal Hospital, a maternity and childcare hospital at Sriaha, and a gynaecological hospital in Bhadrapur. On the economic front, India has been funding vocational training centres for women and schools for girls in Biratnagar and Kanchanpur.⁹⁰

While women are beneficiaries of some HICDP projects, a feminist focus is still not a policy priority in India's broader development cooperation. This is different from the approach of other countries such as Sweden, which has adopted a feminist foreign policy, and Canada, which has a feminist approach that guides the country's development policy. Given that India is still designing its agenda for development partnership, there is immense potential to include a gendered focus in its policies abroad. India should increase support to proposals dedicated to gender equality and women empowerment. As a requirement, the impact assessment of HICDPs should include a marker to include women as beneficiaries. India is already a part of international conventions for making the development process inclusive. India was also a part of the World Conference on Women in Mexico (1975) and Beijing (1995), which called for special resources for the integration of women in development.⁹¹ A World Bank study has shown that when women gain access to better economic opportunities, the benefits grow and are passed on faster to other members of the community.⁹²

Cross-border trade

India's trade with its neighbouring countries is approximately 2% of its global trade. Within this, land-based trade is even lower.⁹³ It is conducted through the Integrated Check Posts (ICP) and Land Customs Stations (LCS) on India's land border with the neighbouring countries. India currently has 9 operational ICPs at its borders. The ICPs represent the modernisation of border management infrastructure replacing a few LCS to facilitate cross-border trade and passenger movement. Despite the upgradation in cross-border infrastructure at a few places, cross-border trade in South Asia continues to be restricted by several tariff barriers, non-tariff

barriers and infrastructure deficits.⁹⁴ Lack of women's participation is another critical problem to address in cross-border trade in South Asia. It hinders women's access to economic resources, rendering them vulnerable, especially in border areas, by increasing the likelihood of their participation in informal trade.

Several studies have been conducted over the years with recommendations for making cross-border trade feasible for both men and women.⁹⁵ Yet there has only been limited improvement in making cross-border trade in South Asia inclusive. Trade barriers, including cumbersome documentary requirements, regulatory procedures and infrastructure deficits are still prevalent, and these have a different impact on men and women. As a result, the opportunities for men and women in cross-border trade are unequal.

Several factors restrict the participation of women. First, the border haats, ICPs, and LCS are located in remote border areas that are not easily accessible by public transport.⁹⁶ The distance and ease of travel is a critical factor affecting women's participation. Second, there is a lack of gender sensitisation among border authorities including the customs and border security officials. As a result, women have been subjected to harassment and longer waiting periods. Third, the cumbersome regulatory and documentation procedures make it difficult for women to have equal access. India's land ports are still awaiting digitisation. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs are less likely to have the monetary resources to utilise the services of a customs broker, in addition to all the charges incurred while exporting and importing. Fourth, obtaining import clearance especially from Partner Government Agencies (PGAs) such as plant and animal quarantine, drug controller, textile committee etc. is cumbersome for women because they are located far from the trade centres.

Several steps must be taken to address these challenges. This includes improving public transportation to border areas, digitisation of services to reduce human interaction, improving the border infrastructure making it conducive for women and conducting gender sensitisation exercises at the land ports for customs, port and border control authorities.

Health cooperation

Under the Neighbourhood First policy, India's relations with the neighbouring countries have been expanding in many spheres, including economic, defence, political, cultural and health cooperation.⁹⁷ Out of these, health cooperation has not gained as much momentum as expected. Barring the initiatives undertaken during the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in South Asia, health cooperation does not seem to be a priority area. Between April 2016 and July 2019, India signed 146 MoUs with eight neighbouring countries (Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives, and Afghanistan), of which only 8 were on health cooperation. The low figure is particularly striking for Bangladesh, with only 3 MoUs on health out of 62, given that India is a key destination for medical tourism for Bangladeshis.⁹⁸

Due to such low priority accorded to health cooperation in general, a feminist agenda for health cooperation in South Asia is unlikely to be a policy priority of the governments in the near future. This should alarm policymakers in the region for two reasons. Women constitute a significant proportion of the healthcare workforce in South Asia (albeit in low-profile jobs) and women of the region face significant health disparities.⁹⁹ Women in South Asia face higher rates of multi-morbidity compared to men and have a lower life expectancy compared to the women in the developed regions.¹⁰⁰

Globally, there is an increasing recognition for gender equality in the health sector. The World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted a gender policy in 2002. More recently, the European Union formulated a Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 prioritising regular exchanges on gender-specific health risks.¹⁰¹ The EU Battling Cancer Plan 2020 also includes a gender dimension. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN has accorded policy priority to gender-equal opportunities for those employed in the healthcare sector.¹⁰² It is recognised that tapping women's economic potential in the healthcare sector is crucial for developing the ASEAN Economic Community and increasing medical tourism.¹⁰³

Given the increasing health challenges in South Asia, there is a need to put gender-sensitive health cooperation high on the agenda. This can be done by adopting a feminist approach to healthcare wherein collaborations in advanced medical research, pharma production, disease surveillance,

and exchange of medical professionals can be gender sensitive. For instance, in the Latin American Region, cross-country studies (Bolivia, Columbia, Peru, and Uruguay) were conducted by Mexico to examine how innovations in the health sector improved the reproductive health services for women.¹⁰⁴ As India engages in capacity building of health professionals in countries such as Bangladesh, there is a need to integrate gender in the health training.¹⁰⁵ The sensitisation exercise for medical professionals must also cut across caste, class, and ethnicity.¹⁰⁶ Beyond access to medical services, there is also a need to increase women's economic potential in the healthcare sector by providing equal opportunities and access to training for nurses and doctors.

Conclusion

India has been pushing for an increasingly progressive and feminist approach in multilateral fora, for example on UN peacekeeping or development. In 2015, India's representative to the United Nations, Asoke Mukerji emphasised the importance of human security and that "to sustain solutions to conflict situations, we must synergize the Women, Peace and Security Agenda with the relevant Agenda 2030 goals for sustainable development."¹⁰⁷

This global posture contrasts with India's hitherto conservative approach to South Asia, a region where it traditionally prioritised hard security approaches and neglected new ways to deal with NTS challenges. However, the changing regional imperatives and India's interests under the new Neighbourhood First policy now warrant a change, including through more inclusive, gender-sensitive and feminist initiatives to South Asia's myriad non-traditional security challenges. In no other Indian foreign policy domain is this transformation more required and urgent, but also most difficult.

Under the Neighbourhood First policy, India has accelerated its efforts towards pushing for regional connectivity. This is now a strategic imperative that is challenging New Delhi to re-think its traditional, hard security-oriented approach.¹⁰⁸ **It is today increasingly difficult for India to foster cooperative initiatives for cross-border connectivity, trade and mobility without adopting new policy instruments that are more**

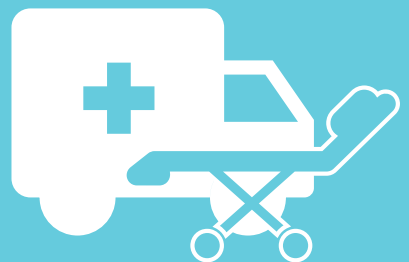
inclusive to engage a more diverse group of stakeholders. Women play a critical role in this transformation, whether as policy-makers, civil society activists or citizen beneficiaries.

By analysing six key indicators of India's foreign policy in South Asia that pose NTS challenges, this essay proposed feminist initiatives for a more inclusive and sustainable development in the region. Whether it is through regional institutions, the flow of refugees, emergency response, development partnerships, cross-border trade or health cooperation, there is an immense potential for India to undertake gender-sensitive interventions. In every domain, this will require a collaborative approach with its regional neighbours, as well as with other international partners whose feminist foreign and development policies are more advanced.

“ It is today increasingly difficult for India to foster cooperative initiatives for cross-border connectivity, trade and mobility without adopting new policy instruments that are more inclusive to engage a more diverse group of stakeholders. Women play a critical role in this transformation, whether as policy-makers, civil society activists or citizen beneficiaries.

Health Security

04.



The Pandemic and India's Health Diplomacy from a FFP Perspective

Swagata Yadavar

Introduction

"Normally in discussions in international meetings that many of us attend, health security didn't even feature, for it to reach the top of the agenda required a pandemic like this," Rahul Chhabra, Secretary, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India¹⁰⁹

This quote explains the position of health security in the global foreign policy agenda before COVID-19 hit the world. By January 10, 2022,¹¹⁰ over 307 million people had been infected and more than 54.9 million died due to COVID-19 since it was first detected in China in 2019. By May 2022, India, with the second highest number of cases, reported 43 million infected and 527,000 deaths.¹¹¹

Health diplomacy, which has played an important role in India's economic and diplomatic engagement globally in the past, was brought front and centre in India's foreign policy strategy by 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Chiefly through vaccines, medical supplies and COVID-19 patent negotiations. Many of India's actions during the pandemic resonate with the core principles of inclusion of the Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) discourse.

However, as the cases mounted and overwhelmed the country's underprepared public health system, like several other countries, India too was faced with gaps in vaccine delivery internally and externally. India had to halt its support to other countries and focus on ramping up internal health infrastructure and delivery systems. This essay analyses both the steps that India took in response to the pandemic, which resonate strongly with FFP/Gender mainstreaming thinking, as well as the gaps which could be bridged if more feminist considerations were to be applied to health policy by design rather than default.

India's health diplomacy

India's engagement through health diplomacy precedes the COVID-19 crisis. The country has played first responder¹¹² in the region during various crises including the Nepal earthquake in 2015, Easter bombings in Sri Lanka in 2019, and water crisis in Maldives in 2014. Analysis of budget data of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) from 2016-17 by T.C. James and Apurva Bhatnagar in an RIS Paper¹¹³ reveal Nepal to be amongst the top receivers of India's health sector assistance, followed by Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

Considered the pharmacy of the world, the Indian pharma sector is recognized for its immense contribution to developing and supplying critical life saving drugs for HIV/AIDS, cancer, malaria, tuberculosis at highly competitive prices to countries in need globally and particularly to low-income countries. The Indian pharmaceutical sector supplied¹¹⁴ over 50% of global demand for various vaccines, 40% of generic demand in the US and 25% of all medicine in the UK.

India has been a popular destination for 'Medical Tourism' according to several press reports, and was also ranked as the third most popular destination¹¹⁵ for medical tourism in 2015. In 2019, 'Medical Visa' was included as a category when India expanded and simplified its e-tourism visa scheme, and visitors were given the right to receive any medical treatment in India (with the exception of organ donations). According to statistics,¹¹⁶ India receives most of its medical tourists from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nigeria, Kenya and Iraq.

In 2019 India launched the e-VidyaBharti (Tele-education) and e-ArogyaBharti (Tele-medicine) Project, and unveiled a tele-education portal, 'ilearn.gov.in',¹¹⁷ which provides access for African students to over 500 courses in various disciplines including the sciences, along with making 15000 scholarships available.

During COVID-19 crisis

India's response to the global pandemic was in line with its strategy since the beginning. In March 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the video conference of SAARC leaders suggested health professionals of all member states hold a video conference "to carry forward collaboration in the common fight against Covid19 at the practical level."¹¹⁸

India created¹¹⁹ a COVID-19 Emergency Fund based on voluntary contributions from SAARC countries, along with making an initial offer of USD 10 million for the fund. It also developed 'SAARC COVID19 Information Exchange Platform'¹²⁰(COINEX)', an electronic platform for SAARC countries to share information on combating the virus and kept up engagements with various international groups by participating in multiple virtual meetings—with Indo-Pacific countries, the G-20 group, and interactions with BRICS nations.

Using its well-established pharmaceutical prowess, India provided critical medical aid, including drugs and testing kits to SAARC countries, and other forms of medical assistance to Myanmar, Latin American, African, and Caribbean countries. India exported about three million paracetamol tablets and four million hydroxychloroquine tablets (then considered to be COVID-19 prophylaxis) across the world. It provided technical assistance by dispatching rapid response teams to countries like Kuwait and Maldives and organised e-ITEC¹²¹ training programmes for healthcare professionals across the world under its reputed medical colleges, including All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, and Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh.

In a landmark move, in October 2020¹²² India and South Africa asked member states of the World Trade Organisation to neither grant nor enforce any patents related to COVID-19 drugs, vaccines, diagnostics and other technologies for the duration of the pandemic. This would essentially mean that COVID-19 vaccines and drugs could be manufactured in facilities across the world – and not just in a small number of factories that held the licences. This was important because distribution of COVID-19 vaccines has been unequal, countries with the highest incomes have been vaccinated 10 times faster¹²³ than those with the lowest. In the 2021 “Quad” meeting, a key takeaway was the agreement on expanding global vaccine supply, which critically depends on India’s ability to produce vaccines. Quad leaders from Australia, Japan, and the United States announced that by 2022, the vaccination capacity of India would be increased to 1 billion doses.¹²⁴

India’s decision to look beyond self-interest and send essential commodities and medical aid when most of the powerful countries closed off their borders and limited their exports, ‘underlined its credentials as a responsible global stakeholder, delivering results when they are most needed,’ wrote Harsh Pant in Observer Research Foundation’s Raisina Debates in June 2020.¹²⁵ In early 2021 India launched the ‘Vaccine Maitri’ initiative. In the 150 countries it helped with vaccines, Indian shipments were the first to reach them.

Even though India imposed a stringent lockdown and closed its border, it continued to extend medical support and training to other developing nations. Under ‘Vaccine Maitri’ (friendship) India supplied COVID-19 vaccines to its neighbours and other nations, until the devastating second wave in April 2021.

Vaccine-aid and vaccine access

India started international shipments of the vaccines, four days after starting its own vaccination programme in January 2021. The first few countries to receive vaccines as grants were Bhutan and Maldives followed by Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Seychelles. Later India was supplying vaccines commercially to Canada, UK and Saudi Arabia.¹²⁶ By March 2021, India had supplied 19.8 million doses of the Covishield vaccine (manufactured by Serum Institute of India that was licensed by AstraZeneca), as its commitment to COVAX, an initiative by international organisations—CEPI, GAVI, WHO and UNICEF—to promote equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines by providing vaccines to 190 countries including 92 low and middle income countries in the world.

However, in the face of a devastating second wave around the end of March 2021, India temporarily banned exports of all COVID vaccines to tackle its own domestic compulsions. This impacted vaccine supplies to 190 countries under COVAX. By December 2021, COVAX was responsible for less than 5 percent vaccinations across the world¹²⁷ and while most adults in the developed world were vaccinated, less than 6 percent of the African continent were vaccinated. As a result of halting exports for more than six months, India lost some of its credibility as a supplier of vaccines. The fact that commercial contracts were taken over by the government officials and the way some of the vaccines for the poorer countries ended up in the UK and Canada, cast a shadow on the image India wanted to portray since the beginning of the pandemic. Further, as India's development assistance did not underline a gender inclusive and equitable usage and distribution criteria, there were gaps in access to vaccines and medical assistance between men and women.

Domestic realities that impact perceptions of India

The Indian health system is capable of dealing with large scale catastrophes and has demonstrated so in the past.¹²⁸ The tendency, however, is to be more reactive, which could work while dealing with a spot fix, but fails when dealing with a crisis of a scale that has cascading effects on society. India's domestic fault lines in health security that

were exposed through the pandemic potentially impact India's image, credibility, and jeopardizes the expectations on India's ability to lead by example in the region.

India spends just 1.25% of its gross domestic product on health and is amongst the lowest spenders¹²⁹ of healthcare in the world. When COVID's second wave struck India, the whole health system was caught off-guard and collapsed. Despite the early national lockdown, very little had been done to prepare the health system for the pandemic. Failure to reduce the shock of the pandemic left a deep impact on the most vulnerable groups. The government also failed to increase the health budget and the allocations to the ministry were reduced by 11 percent with only a 4 percent increase to the National Health Mission, the main instrument to provide healthcare to the masses.

There were gaps in the way COVID vaccination and treatment were accessed internally: for every 1000 men vaccinated against COVID-19, only 954 women received the vaccine in India with metros having the widest gender gap, as of January 2022.¹³⁰ Further, pregnant and lactating women were not eligible for vaccination till July 2021.¹³¹ There were also rumours¹³² (and later proven to be misinformation) that women should not take the vaccine five days before or after menstruation.

Since there was severe restriction to transportation, women struggled to access reproductive services. The lockdown also impacted¹³³ routine immunisations, antenatal care and chronic illness services like tuberculosis treatment, antiretroviral treatment and dialysis. Women make up a large number of healthcare workers in India— accounting for up to 80% of nurses and midwives. The pandemic also brought to the front the working conditions of India's healthcare workforce. For example, most of India's health programmes are dependent on the door-to-door visits conducted by a million women that work as Accredited Social Health Activists¹³⁴ (ASHA) in rural and semi-urban areas. They conduct door to door surveys for COVID-19 patients, provide treatment, refer them to hospitals and encourage them to be vaccinated. ASHAs however are considered "honorary volunteers" that receive a stipend and not a salary yet work an average of 8-12 hours a day in the field.

There were also several cascading effects of the health crisis: women in India as in several other countries had to deal with lower wages, more household responsibilities¹³⁵ and higher incidence of domestic violence. Children were amongst the worst affected, as schools and anganwadis¹³⁶ were closed and several children missed out on the free mid-day meals or hot-cooked meals provided at anganwadis and schools, for about a year. Prolonged school closure could result in a higher incidence of dropouts especially in the case of girls, warned an August 2020 United Nations report¹³⁷. Even as classes continued digitally, almost half of the children did not have access to smartphones and struggled with connectivity issues, lack of electricity etc.

Several of the issues faced during the pandemic were not unique to India alone and common to even some of the more developed nations. However, for India, these domestic health care realities reduce the confidence in the country's ability to lead external conversations on best practices and collaborations for better health care. In global feminist foreign policy discourse, the argument in favour of considering a gender mainstreaming approach is also to serve as a force for greater action domestically on ground. It is also a starting point for re-thinking the way we make decisions in general.

Recommendations for the way forward

For India, foreign policy is an ideal avenue to pursue inclusive action, as there is already evidence (mentioned earlier in this essay) of such considerations. Keeping these in mind, some recommendations for more inclusive considerations that could positively influence domestic as well as external actions include:

Humanitarian assistance:

A wider inclusive and rights-based approach as advocated by principles of Feminist Foreign Policy could aid in anticipating the impact on vulnerable communities and improving humanitarian assistance through targeted social spending to counter balance the cascading effects of health emergencies. For example, Canada which has adopted a Feminist International Assistance Policy, offered \$1.5 million to WHO to help vulnerable countries fight COVID-19. Further, it spent \$40 million on

women's shelters and sexual assault centres in order to support women and children fleeing from violence as part of their 'COVID-19 economic response plan.'¹³⁸

Greater representation of women, minorities, scientists and other diverse voices in government task forces:

While the government cannot be faulted for announcing a lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus, the sudden announcement and lack of social security measures meant most Indians suffered and continue to suffer the consequences of the measures that were taken. While health experts eventually were a part of various taskforces, our decision-making structures do not always account for more diverse representation in the decision-making process. According to a 2020 UNDP-UN Women study¹³⁹, only 13% of the COVID-19 task force members in India were women, lower than the global average of 24%. Greater diversity in representation can help broader thinking on issues and more creative problem solving. Apart from women this could also entail greater involvement of relevant organisations working on ground, as well as representatives of various groups most affected in a particular crisis.

Ensuring equitable access to facilities as well as information:

While the Indian government helped other countries in medical aid and advocated for waiver of intellectual property rights for more equitable distribution of COVID-19 therapeutics and drugs, it failed to keep equity at the centre of its policies domestically and in its foreign policy. Some very basic campaigns on preventing misinformation on vaccines, taking measures to keep non-COVID health services working, much of the suffering of the patients of other diseases would have been prevented. India should have ensured uninterrupted access to reproductive services and increased funding for nutrition programmes for women and children. If India had provided cash transfers (given the penetration of Aadhaar linked bank accounts through Jan Dhan Yojana¹⁴⁰), millions of households would possibly not be food insecure or in debt.

Towards a more humane world:

Feminist foreign policy would mean a more humane and rights oriented approach in decision making and policy implementation. This would impact not just the way health matters have been prioritised by the politicians of the country, but also how India deals in its foreign policy. If

the almost two-year-old COVID-19 pandemic has taught us something it is that 'no one is safe until everyone is safe' and yet we see policies that are overtly aggressive, rigid and hyper-nationalistic. As the world faces newer threats, the status quo will not cut it. If the suffering caused by COVID-19 policies is something to go by, the approach doesn't work.

The time has come for India and the world to embrace the feminist perspective in policies and especially in foreign policy. This would mean approaching health problems with the intention of collaborative knowledge sharing, learning from countries that have (comparatively) managed the pandemic well, and placing inclusive development and human rights at the centre of all policies. In these unprecedented times, lines between domestic and foreign policy spheres can blur, but a feminist perspective can ensure that neither sphere is compromised on at the cost of the other.

“ A wider inclusive and rights-based approach as advocated by principles of Feminist Foreign Policy could aid in anticipating the impact on vulnerable communities and improving humanitarian assistance through targeted social spending to counter balance the cascading effects of health emergencies.

Regional and Global Trade

05.



Case for Including Gender Mainstreaming in India's Free Trade Agreements

Nisha Taneja, Sanjana Joshi and Shravani Prakash

Introduction

Benefits of women's participation in trade are well documented: the International Trade Centre (ITC)'s 2015 publication *Unlocking Markets for Women to Trade*¹⁴¹ finds that women-owned businesses that export are more than 3.5 times productive than women-owned businesses that do not export; women entrepreneurs are more likely to employ women in comparison to men-owned and managed companies; and the average pay by exporting women-owned businesses is approximately 1.6 times higher than the average pay at non-exporting women-owned businesses. Similarly, the 2020 joint World Bank and WTO report *Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Women's Equality*¹⁴² is the latest such work to show that firms that engage in international trade employ more women; women are also better represented in firms that are part of global value chains (GVCs); women's wages are relatively higher in globally engaged firms; and women workers in trade integrated sectors are more likely to be employed formally with opportunities to receive benefits, training, and job security. The report notes that women have unique opportunities to benefit from new trends in global trade, specifically the rise in services, global value chains, and the digital economy.

To reap these benefits, however, multiple interventions are required that further women's economic empowerment. International trade policy is

one area in which action can be taken. Since 2016, there has been an upsurge of Free Trade Agreements (FTA) that have addressed gender equality concerns. **FTAs are increasingly being used as avenues for pushing for an inclusive trade agenda aiming to distribute trade benefits in a gender-just manner. In recent years, more and more countries have included gender considerations in their trade agreements, albeit with very different scope, format and coverage.**

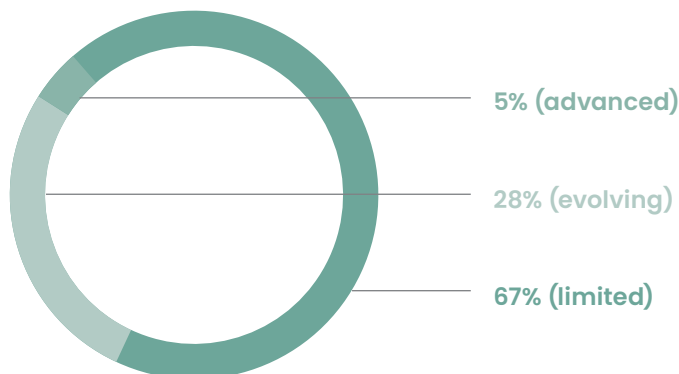
As noted in the 2020 ITC report on Mainstreaming Gender in Free Trade Agreements,¹⁴³ more than a quarter of the 292 FTAs in force currently and notified to the WTO have at least one gender-explicit provision. While, for now, the level of gender responsiveness is limited in the FTAs, the trend is upward. Significant recent developments include – 2018 European Parliament resolution¹⁴⁴ to include gender equality consideration in all future trade agreements it would sign; and modernization of both the Canada-Chile FTA¹⁴⁵ and the Canada-Israel FTA¹⁴⁶ with a dedicated chapter on gender and trade in 2019; the 2020 Global Trade and Gender Arrangement between Canada, Chile and New Zealand¹⁴⁷; and chapter on trade and gender equality in the Australia-UK FTA¹⁴⁸ signed in December 2021. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement¹⁴⁹ that came into effect on January 1, 2021 and created one of the largest free trade areas in the world also has a high level of gender responsiveness including promise to muster resources to improve the export capacity of women entrepreneurs and SMEs.

Gender-related provisions are heterogeneous. The way in which the provisions are included in the text of the agreements varies, appearing in the preamble, in stand-alone chapters, side agreements, specific agreements, protocols and so on, or in some combination. ITC's Mainstreaming Gender in Free Trade Agreements report¹⁵⁰ notes that –

- some FTAs have a whole chapter with a number of provisions on trade and gender, but no compulsory and enforceable obligations.
- some FTAs have a single gender-explicit provision, but that single provision creates a legally-binding obligation.

- some FTAs have sought to work on these concerns via cooperative actions including exchange of best practices and organisation of capacity-building workshops; others have reserved the right to regulate particular professions that most directly impact women or services related to nutrition or childcare for instance.
- some FTAs have only general statements wherein parties acknowledge the importance of the role of women in trade and commerce.
- some FTAs have affirming and reaffirming provisions, wherein parties commit to engaging in concrete actions or reaffirm their commitments made under other international instruments.
- some FTAs are completely silent or merely make a single mention of expressions relating to gender equality, while others mention gender-explicit expressions more than 40 times in their main text (as in the case of Canada – Chile FTA).

ITC's Report⁵¹ provides a framework that identifies three stages of gender responsiveness – limited, evolving and advanced. Using the framework, they assessed the degree of gender responsiveness of 73 agreements signed by 25 Commonwealth Countries to find that –



- 67% have 'limited' gender responsiveness – Accords at this level are gender-blind or gender neutral, as they fail to mainstream gender concerns (40% make no explicit reference whatsoever to gender).
- 28% have an 'evolving' level of gender responsiveness – Accords at this level use some best practices to mainstream gender concerns, and have significant scope to improve.
- 5% have an 'advanced' level of gender responsiveness – Accords at this level use best practices, and there is no or only a negligible scope for further improvement.

The topics addressed in gender provisions also vary, as some include provisions on social and healthcare concerns of women, and others have covered purely economic- and market-oriented interests. The location of gender provisions in different agreements is also diverse, as they are included in agreements' preambles, objectives and principles clauses, stand-alone chapters, side agreements, specific provisions, cross-cutting provisions or chapters, protocols, arrangements or even annexes (The Evolution of Gender-Related Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements , WTO Working Paper 8)¹⁵²

Gender-related provisions are considered as enforceable when they fall within the ambit of an agreement's dispute settlement mechanism. Most of the gender-related provisions are found in chapters on cooperation, which mostly are excluded from the agreement's dispute settlement mechanism's scope.

India has abstained and has reservations

In India, even though women's entrepreneurship has begun to receive attention from the policy establishment in recent years, support for internationalization of women-owned enterprises through targeted measures to boost women's participation in international trade has lagged (Women and Trade: Towards an Enabling Ecosystem, ICRIER Policy Brief 12).¹⁵³

India has voted against the Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment¹⁵⁴ issued at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Ministerial Conference II in Buenos Aires in December 2017. India's refusal to be party to the agreement stems from a lack of conviction in gender being a trade-related issue, despite the country's full-fledged support for gender equality. Reportedly¹⁵⁵, India argued that *"gender is not a trade-related subject and that Developed countries could use their high standards of gender equity to curb exports from the developing world."* The Buenos Aires declaration is currently supported by 127 WTO members and observers.

India has also adopted a cautious approach and not included gender issues in any existing FTA. Media reports¹⁵⁶ suggest that, in the ongoing negotiations for an India-UK bilateral trade agreement, the UK is demanding India to address issues around women's economic empowerment and gender equality in trade. India is reportedly open to the suggestion but would be likely to "support inclusion of gender perspective if the incorporated measures for empowering women are transparent in their intention".

India's concerns are valid

There is no clear global pattern in the trade-gender inequality relationship. There is no evidence¹⁵⁷ to suggest that trade liberalization affects gender inequality in low-income country labour markets or that trade-induced technological change reduces gender inequality in developed countries.

Traditionally India has been wary of linking non-trade/progressive issues such as human rights, labour standards, gender, and environment with trade, both bilaterally and multilaterally, by and large regarding them as 'veiled protectionism'¹⁵⁸. This is not completely baseless, as it is true that "Cultural imperialism" could be perceived as a protectionist weapon to take advantage of unequal market power. Countries may use gender provisions to enhance their own competitive advantage by imposing their social or cultural model on countries that have a different set of values and concerns. The fear of cultural imperialism was in fact the main concern several countries voiced when they refrained from signing the WTO 2017 Declaration or joining the recently formed WTO informal group (IWGTG) 101 to discuss these matters.¹⁵⁹

However, it makes economic sense for India to join in

Gender mainstreaming into trade agreements is a logical next step as part of India's focus on "Women led development"¹⁶⁰ and the gender mainstreaming efforts at the national level, including the implementation of gender budgeting¹⁶¹ and special focus for women under Stand Up India¹⁶² schemes. It would also allow India a better chance at reaping the trade gains of women's participation in trade. Including gender components in trade agreements would represent a positive step¹⁶³ forward in efforts to promote women's economic empowerment, by raising awareness of and giving credibility to the gender perspective in economic and trade issues. FTAs can act as laboratories in which to experiment with the complex amalgamation of trade and gender concerns.¹⁶⁴

While trade policy is not generally considered among the alternatives for promoting gender equality, empirical evidence¹⁶⁵ does suggest that trade liberalization can have significant effects on gender inequality in wages and employment. More importantly, the effect of trade policy¹⁶⁶ on economic and social activities tends to be different between men and women due to socio-cultural, political and economic factors. Women tend to be more affected by the negative side-effects of trade liberalization and are facing bigger challenges than men when it comes to taking advantage of the opportunities trade offers. Recent experiences in trade liberalization and their impacts on gender equality make a strong case for the need to incorporate gender perspectives into overall trade policy design and implementation.

In most agreements, gender-related provisions are non-binding, drafted with non-mandatory verbs and "soft" permissive grammatical constructions.¹⁶⁷ Gender-related provisions¹⁶⁸ are excluded from the scope of the dispute settlement system, as they are drafted with good-faith cooperation and best endeavours, to solve disputes arising from gender-related provisions through dialogue and cooperation. Therefore, most gender considerations cannot be enforced through a binding and compulsory dispute settlement mechanism, so a country faces no direct consequence for not meeting its obligations or commitments. Canada-Israel FTA is the first as well as the only FTA¹⁶⁹ with a binding mechanism which states that "If the Parties cannot resolve the matter in accordance with paragraph 1, they may consent to submit the matter to dispute

settlement in accordance with Chapter Nineteen Dispute Settlement.” However, this jurisdiction is not compulsory as the parties must agree to it when a problem arises.

India could follow the example of Chile.¹⁷⁰ While focusing more on female economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, rural development, and access to the financial sector, Chile has conducted gender-mainstreaming, and incorporated gender as a trade relevant issue. Assessing Chile’s four ratified FTAs with gender chapters: Chile-Uruguay, Chile-Canada, Chile-Argentina, and Chile-Brazil – shows that the gender chapters mainly make references to the implementation of gender equality commitments included in global conventions, with no specific commitments. All are “soft law” approaches where dispute settlement mechanisms do not apply.

Recommendations for India to mainstream gender into FTAs

At the international level, gender equality considerations are gaining traction in bilateral and multilateral trade discussions and agreements. With the global discourse veering towards inclusiveness in trade and sustainability, more so in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, India should embrace a more flexible and pragmatic approach and not lag behind the curve. Specifically, India can take following steps:

1. Join the conversation at the multilateral level

At the multilateral level, a good starting point would be to join the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender¹⁷¹ (IWG) established at the WTO in 2020 as a follow-up to the 2017 Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women’s Economic Empowerment. The Working Group brings together WTO members and observers seeking to intensify efforts to increase women’s participation in global trade. Participation in this Informal Working Group is open to all WTO members and provides India an opportunity to be an insider rather than an outlier.¹⁷²

2. Incorporate Gender mainstreaming in FTAs

Gender mainstreaming in FTAs means the inclusion of gender concerns and gender perspectives in the drafting and implementation of FTAs

and thereby in trade liberalization efforts and policies. The process also aims to maximize the positive impact and minimize the negative impact of trade agreements on women's empowerment goals.¹⁷³ The process of gender mainstreaming will affirm India's commitment to reducing gender inequalities through trade policies and agreements.

The best option to mainstream gender considerations is by including a standalone chapter on trade and gender. Such chapters can describe the political relevance of gender issues within their respective agreements, and serve as an umbrella for all kinds of provisions on gender including cooperation activities, legal standards,¹⁷³ reservations, affirmations and reaffirmations.

Perhaps even more useful, however, would be gender mainstreaming, which means including gender-related provisions throughout FTAs. Provisions promoting women's economic empowerment could be usefully included in several FTA chapters, such as in the areas¹⁷⁴ of government procurement, labour, investment, digital trade and dispute settlement (require diversity in selection of adjudicators).

As a starting point, in the forthcoming FTAs with UK and thereafter with EU, Canada, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Israel, Australia, etc.; India could certainly include gender-related concerns in the preamble and/or agreement's "general objectives". In addition, India can include a clause on cooperation that could cover areas including¹⁷⁵ "skills enhancement; financial inclusion, agency and leadership; access to science, technology and innovation; entrepreneurship". The priorities for cooperation activities can be decided by both parties based on their interests and available resources.

If the gender provisions of India's FTA with the UK are modelled upon UK's FTAs with Australia and New Zealand, then there is little cause of concern as there are no clauses that have the potential to become protectionist. Both the UK-Australia FTA¹⁷⁶ and UK-New Zealand FTA¹⁷⁷ include a chapter on Gender Equality that contain positive affirmations and acknowledgements of the importance of gender equality in advancing equitable growth, and that gender policies are important for ensuring equitable participation in domestic, regional and global economies. The provisions largely centre around the area of "Co-operation", whereby

the parties agree to incorporate gender perspectives in their trade and investment relationship. In addition, the UK-Australia FTA includes an agreement to establish a Dialogue on Trade and Gender Equality and the UK- New Zealand FTA has a provision to establish an Inclusive Trade Sub-Committee. However, both agreements clearly state that “Neither party shall have recourse to dispute settlement) for any matter arising under the Gender Chapters”.

3. Establish a trade and gender committee

India should consider establishing a trade and gender committee to work on activities and make recommendations regarding gender mainstreaming in trade policy and trade agreements and build awareness on how to use trade agreements and policies to empower women.

- Collect gender-disaggregated data to inform negotiations on how trade disciplines affect women.
- Provide the basis to build up political will to leverage trade agreements to empower women.
- Create expertise on gender issues within government departments responsible for carrying out trade negotiations.
- Conduct gender impact assessment and allow for evaluations of gender-sensitive provisions in FTAs.
- Create dedicated procedures and institutions that can put commitments into action.

4. Increase representation of women in international trade policy bodies

One effective way to add a gender lens to future trade negotiations is to appoint more women in negotiating and policy-making roles. Appointment of women to negotiating positions in trade forums may be vital for ensuring that future trade agreements are gender-responsive, as women can add a different perspective to the overall process of negotiations (Women and Trade: Towards an Enabling Ecosystem, ICRIER Policy Brief 12).¹⁷⁸

5. Include women in the FTA negotiations and consultations

In bilateral FTAs under negotiation, India should include women entrepreneurs as important stakeholders in domestic consultations and their aspirations and concerns should be reflected in the finally agreed text.

“ While trade policy is not generally considered among the alternatives for promoting gender equality, empirical evidence does suggest that trade liberalization can have significant effects on gender inequality in wages and employment. More importantly, the effect of trade policy on economic and social activities tends to be different between men and women due to socio-cultural, political and economic factors. Women tend to be more affected by the negative side-effects of trade liberalization and are facing bigger challenges than men when it comes to taking advantage of the opportunities trade offers.

The Future of Multilateral Institutions

06.



Gender-Mainstreaming: An agenda for India and the BRICS

Amitabh Mattoo and Dorothy Deb

Gender in International Relations

International relations (IR) for the longest time was believed to have functioned in isolation, unaffected by the social, political and cultural realities of individual participating countries. This belief is defunct today, as we live in an interconnected world defined by intersectional realities, and gender is one such factor that impacts sustainable development and growth. Yet, in policy conversations, there is a lack of seriousness given to gender, where such considerations have largely been tokenistic, subverted by the traditional concerns of security and great power competition. The primary reason behind such an omission is that gender is largely perceived as an ancillary concern that is specifically targeted towards women. Gender has been overlooked also because it is seen as a problem and not as an important component in international relations. To consider gender, is to consider the question of the body, which is a site of violence, a site of assertion as well as a fundamental unit in politics¹⁷⁹. Gender also concerns itself with the question of boundaries, i.e. where does the body become a site of violence, where does assertion begin or where intervention ends. **In using gender as a logic and a lens, more complete truths can be depicted about global politics.** There is very clearly a gap between women's recognition, representation and their contribution to international politics. Traditional concerns drew boundaries outside of

the domestic and restricted women's presence only to the household. However, international politics thrives on the contribution of the countless women who are restricted to household chores, low-paid wage workers who perform clerical work, sex-workers who service soldiers in war zones and many others. The women who do make their presence visible in international politics are expected to keep their feminine instincts aside owing to the over-riding importance of masculinity in the practise of high-politics in the global arena. Such gaps can only be countered if gender becomes a primary lens of viewing the world, which would make this gap evident to all major foreign policy decision-making platforms.

The persistent efforts of civil society organisations and feminist collectives, have brought gender mainstreaming to the attention of national governments and multilateral organisations alike. Multilateral Institutions have the scope for facilitating, the functional, systemic and symbolic participation of women; as well as the potential to encourage member countries to adopt gender mainstreaming. There has been a basic recognition that addressing gender disparity is essential for the holistic development of nations and the international community. United Nations (1997) defines gender mainstreaming as "a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively." Thus, ensuring that the gendered consequences of policies are not overlooked. Gender mainstreaming as a concept emerged in the 1980s in International Politics, as a critique of the lack of assessment of the 'Women in International Development' paradigm in the 1970s UN Decade for Women. From this critical approach, a new 'Gender and Development (GAD)' paradigm took shape which laid focus on the unpaid reproductive labour of women and tried to envision a bottom-up development involving participatory planning. The new GAD paradigm soon found takers in several international institutions like the United Nations, World Bank, International Criminal Court and European Union. All of which came to the consensus that gender mainstreaming is an important strategy for global gender equality. The previous "add women and stir" logic to international issues was becoming dated¹⁸⁰. The 2013 articulation of Sustainable Developmental Goals have given credence to the importance of gender in all policy formulations. SDG 5 speaks of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Most countries in the world have expressed their commitment towards the SDGs in general and SDG 5 in particular.

Feminist Foreign Policy flows directly from the umbrella concept of Gender Mainstreaming. It aims at formulating a gender-equal structure; where traditionally marginalised groups find representation, are prioritised and funded with the aim to disrupt patriarchal power structures and bring in holistic progress for all. It is a bottom-up approach, thus rejecting a one-size-fits-all logic. The final articulation of the Feminist Foreign policy differs from country to country, region to region. Individual countries like Sweden, Mexico, Canada, and France have incorporated such gender mainstreaming in their foreign policy. Even countries in the global south, like Mexico, Argentina and Libya have come to embrace the concept. However, most countries in the world are yet to make structural changes to incorporate gender mainstreaming in their policies. Multilateral organisations can play a crucial role in making and adopting these structural changes. They can set collective goals with all member nations and related stakeholders and organisations, follow up on the progress of individual member countries and streamline flow of funds for gender-sensitive policy making.

Today, beyond multilateralism, nations are organising themselves into plurilateral groupings where like-minded countries may come together to negotiate, influence or formulate their political stance and policies outside of the multilateral framework. Plurilateral organisations are smaller groupings that aim towards voluntary issue-based cooperation; hence they usually come to a consensus much faster and can become important facilitators for gender quality. In this paper we look at BRICS, a plurilateral organisation of the most significant economies of the global south. We specifically probe into the efforts towards gender mainstreaming in policies of BRICS as an organisation and India as a member state. Further, we assess the current roadblocks to gender mainstreaming, and formulate a roadmap for India's contribution at BRICS targeted to address these gaps.

BRICS and Gender Mainstreaming

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) as the conglomerate of developing countries who have the fastest emerging economies, a major population, landmass and resource pool, has been an influential voice in the new millennium. BRICS as an organisation is guided by the

principle of “relational multilateralism”, which prioritises consensual decision-making, voluntary engagement, a strict reverence to national sovereignty, without any legally binding agreements. As countries come to a consensus keeping in mind their interests, they have a lower chance of defaulting from agreed upon commitments. Hence BRICS is a flexible yet effective platform for bringing the most influential voices of the global south to a consensus. Apart from making joint declarations and setting joint goals; since 2014 BRICS nations have decided to back their efforts with a monetary pool. The New Development Bank (NDB) set up in 2015, with headquarters in Shanghai, has a collective currency pool exceeding US\$100 billion, which serves as a tool to actualise the sustainable development goals for the BRICS. When BRICS countries are able to come to a consensus on key issues, they can steer negotiations in other multilateral organisations as well. BRICS has been most successful in cooperating on matters of trade and development finance including seeking reforms in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). They have also tried to bring positive change to their socio-cultural environments, to positively affect their developmental trajectory.

The BRICS as a grouping have made a collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and committed to fully implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. Member states have taken actions individually⁶¹ and collectively to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation and improve the quality of women’s employment. The members have addressed the issues of women’s economic empowerment since 2010 when the leaders pledged to give special attention to the most vulnerable groups such as women in cooperation for sustainable social development, with social protection, full employment, and decent work policies. In 2018 at the 10th BRICS summit the BRICS Gender and Women’s Forum was conceived, which acknowledged the existing gender gap, to focus developmental energies on issues that affect women disproportionately, apply gender equality across all its themes and mainstream gender issues as a factor involving major decision-making.

While BRICS nations have committed to SDG 5, there hasn’t been any joint effort made to decide on a roadmap for achieving SDG 5. There is no accountability mechanism within the BRICS to check if countries

are making any tangible progress to include more women in decision-making processes or creating an environment conducive for women's participation. **The BRICS commitments need to be transformed into tangible realities which would be visible in the gender segregated developmental indices of the individual nations.** This could positively impact the lives of women of these countries and also set a precedent for other developing nations to adopt gender sensitive policies. A major gap lies in the fact that BRICS as an organisation has not made financial commitments to the cause of gender equality thus far. Its interaction with civil society organisations have been ad-hoc and few, yet effective in driving home the idea of gender mainstreaming. There is an absence of gender segregated data collection which can point to areas which are particularly lagging in gender inclusion and gender impact. There is similarly an absence of a well thought-out, transparent gender budgeting which would result in greater accountability of governments towards investing in gender equity. Finally, the most overarching gap that exists today is rooted patriarchy which permeates through structures and institutions and prevents gender-sensitive policy making.

The Impending Opportunity for BRICS

The greatest strength of BRICS as an organisation is its impact factor. The sheer size of the population of member countries and their potential economic impact makes BRICS an influential voice in the world. A voice that is not ordained to speak the language of the global north. BRICS nations are trying to find culturally consonant solutions to deep rooted recurring issues. **BRICS have made their commitment towards gender equality clear; the next step is to formulate workable policies and agreements towards these commitments.** Individual BRICS nations have policies targeted towards women's empowerment and gender equality, a more stringent functionalisation of these policies would increase the credibility of the individual nations and the organisation as a whole. For example, all BRICS nations pledged equal pay for equal value created by all citizens, yet there exists a major gap between the remuneration of men and women. More and more women are pushed to working in the informal sector, where the government has little to no intervention, thus unable to benefit from the national policies and schemes. Bilateral and multilateral agreements can be signed within the BRICS nations to provide an impetus

to schemes that are lacking funding or institutional capacity.

The New Development Bank brings in new possibilities for BRICS as an organisation. The collective pool of resources can be used for capacity building in countries in the global south which can positively improve the condition of women in these countries. Financial assistance and soft loans can be provided to nations for the purpose of improving gender-equal infrastructure. **The New Development Bank (NDB) gives BRICS the opportunity to back its commitments with funding.**

The BRICS countries have a very strong network of civil society organisations. These organisations work committedly towards collecting ground intelligence and flagging major issue areas. BRICS as an organisation needs to look at more deep engagements with these organisations to understand the gap in their current working and keep up the pace with the currents of the larger feminist movement. For eg: **The BRICS Feminist Watch, a feminist collective across BRICS countries that aims to integrate the feminist agenda with the policies and institutions of BRICS; has been instrumental in pushing for a commitment towards gender equality within BRICS and the NDB.**

Substantial representation is key to inclusive decision-making. BRICS as an organisation should invest in women-centric and women-led organisations or sub-groups. This would propel discussions on the gendered consequences of international events and find sustainable solutions for the same. For eg: **The BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA) has been set up to promote women's entrepreneurship and women's potential in BRICS nations.** The WBA strives to include women led businesses in the global value chains. Similar organs can be set up to not only give impetus to women entrepreneurship but also to their living conditions and social security. Thus, to give credence to their commitment BRICS will have to recommit to gender equality agenda, institutionally, monetarily and functionally.

The Impending Opportunity for BRICS

India has always shown an outward commitment to gender equality in multilateral institutions. In 1998 India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), however it has abstained from the optional clause. India has refrained from ratifying

the Women, Peace and Security resolution and has still not brought out a National WPS Plan. India has reiterated its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2013, with special stress on SDG 5, yet the participation of women or the women centric perspective in all decision-making processes continues to be abysmally low. India has now become a part of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2020; an intergovernmental organisation dedicated solely to the empowerment of women and gender equality. India has been a part of the Women's Parliamentarians Forum in Geneva in 2016, emphasising on the commitment to strengthen parliamentary strategic partnerships on all the three dimensions of sustainable development, fostering gender equality and women empowerment.

India has shown the will to accommodate the gender mainstreaming agenda in its policies, yet the progress in turning these commitments to tangible realities at home has been slow and tedious. **The Indian Government's recent iteration of the National Policy for Women (2019) is a first step of integrating external and internal action.** It identifies major sectors which impact women's lives and aims to remove the gender bias in each of these sectors. The sectors are "Health, including food security and nutrition, Education, Economy (including agriculture industry, labour, employment, NRI (Non-resident Indian and person of Indian origin) women, soft power, service sector, science and technology), Violence against women, Governance and decision making, Enabling environment (including housing, shelter and infrastructure, drinking water and sanitation, media and culture, sports and social security) Environment and climate change." However, for the effective implementation of this policy; India needs to be more proactive in bringing forth a gender budget. In 2021-22, gender budget accounted for only 4.4% of the total budget. Women from the grassroots level up, must be given greater autonomy and agency, security, food security and healthcare benefits, access to basic welfare measures that are not hampered by rooted patriarchy. Effective steps towards bringing gender justice domestically will give India greater credence in multilateral forums. Considering India has started its term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC and is now an elected member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women; it has the opportunity to bring in real change and reclaim its history of advocacy, especially for women's empowerment.

India at BRICS

As a part of BRICS, India has reiterated its commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 at the 8th BRICS Summit held in Goa, stating “We recognise that women play a vital role as agents of development and acknowledge that their equal and inclusive participation and contribution is crucial to making progress across all Sustainable Development Goals and targets. We emphasise the importance of enhancing accountability for the implementation of these commitments.”

India at the BRICS must take up advocacy, formulation and implementation of developmental policies that consider women as primary stakeholders and treat their concerns as central to the larger paradigm of progress. As a part of the BRICS, India can lead conversations on the improvement of infrastructure and institutional capacity in the member nations. India has undertaken several initiatives to improve intra-BRICS cooperation. It has acted as a catalyst for BRICS Academic Summits, BRICS Young Scientists Forum (2016), BRICS Trade Fair etc. Similarly, India can take the first initiative in hosting women’s conclaves which will look beyond the valued added by women in global value chains.

India has a strong network of advocacy groups in the form of civil society organisations, these organisations must be onboarded in greater consultative capacity that can feed into India’s advocacy at the BRICS and other multilateral forums.

Finally, India will have to lead by example. It will have to strive harder to create awareness about the gendered consequences of all policies. It will have to sensitise not just the general population but also its legislators and executives to build an environment conducive for gender equality. If India can bring in gender parity in education, employment and governance; it could credibly advocate for gender justice at the global level. BRICS nations are a formidable force in the world today accounting for 24% of the global GDP. India is a dominant member in this grouping and an active participant. India’s role at the BRICS would be crucial not just for the future of the organisation but also for India’s credibility as a world leader.

India must take up the role of a normative leader, who has control over the narrative of development in the global south with the means to foster that development. In order to do so it will have to speak of developmental issues at every forum that it is a part of, and it must concentrate its resources and energies towards the resolution of these issues. The lack of gender parity is a major issue for India domestically, that reduces its productive capacity. India's role as an advocate for gender justice would not only positively augment the condition of women domestically but will act as a precedent for other countries in the global south to work towards gender justice. India's history of advocacy for human rights will find a fitting succession in its effort to promote gender equity domestically, at BRICS and all other global platforms that it is a member of.

Conclusion

In the international relations framework, gender mainstreaming is becoming a central conversation. **Gender is now being recognized as an integral factor that not only impacts the lives of women but has far reaching impact on structures, institutions and the international community in general.** The journey towards gender mainstreaming has not been easy, nor is it close to its culmination. There is a need to create an environment conducive for embracing inclusivity, facilitating critical thinking, acknowledging and respecting diversity.

The BRICS will have a major role to play as a significant plurilateral organisation in driving the change. It will have to show greater commitment towards gender mainstreaming in member countries by pledging greater monetary support. The New Development Bank would play a crucial role in the same. It would have to drive the conversation beyond representation and equal pay for women, to ensure that gender issues cease to be issues of women and move onto becoming issues central to international polity.

Each member nation must try to integrate its proposed international commitment with concomitant domestic action; wherein the domestic policies will also see gender mainstreaming in conjunction with their foreign policy. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation must focus on the possible range of impact and try to promote mutual commitments to bridging the gender gap. Ensuring that international trade agreements have a gender lens and that trade deals do not have a negative

impact on women and children. Actively collaborating with civil society organisations who have taken up advocacy for gender mainstreaming. Finally, envisioning a change in the structure of national policies, ensuring that gender mainstreaming can be released out of carefully curated silos and made central to conversations of domestic development and international cooperation.

Finally, India, which has been a successful norm setter in the international community, should be at the forefront leading the conversation on Feminist Foreign Policy and gender mainstreaming. It will have to use its position in various multilateral and plurilateral forums to further the cause of gender-equal policy making. **India's principled position on gender equality is well-known and well-recognised; it is time that these commitments take a more tangible shape domestically and internationally.** Yet, in all efforts of gender mainstreaming we must remember the rooted cultural connotations and distinct historical realities that make a nation's population. Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 5, in the years to come would have to be incorporated in every arena of Global Policy Making. India's promising trajectory enlivens hope that more gender sensitive policy making is achievable.

“*In using gender as a logic and a lens, more complete truths can be depicted about global politics.*”

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We hope this compendium will create the momentum needed to push the discourse and investment to infuse India's foreign policy engagements with a gender lens and bring a much-needed southern framing to this growing body of thought. Any unwitting errors rest with the organizations.

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Kubernein Initiative

Kubernein Initiative is an independent, female led, geopolitical advisory firm based in Mumbai, India working to mainstream issues that need greater intellectual capacity and focus. Our vision is to build an organisation that considers critical questions with a perspective that balances traditionally 'western' thought in the field of international relations and diplomacy with new and emerging ideas from the global south.

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Notes

