WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
IN THE INDIAN DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

Preface

ANU PRASAD
Founder & CEO, **India Leaders for Social Sector**

According to the World Economic Forum, Gender Gap Report (July 2022),[1] India's Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) has declined sharply from 31% in 1990 to 21% by 2019, placing India at the 135th position in the world. This ratio fell even further with the advent of the pandemic over the last two years. 47% of women in India suffered permanent job losses due to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and employment.

While there is little data to estimate the proportion of these working women employed in Social Purpose organizations, it is evident that the challenges faced by women in the workforce translate even to the social impact sector.

Sector leaders unanimously acknowledge that having gender diversity among boards and leadership positions allows for incorporation of valuable well-rounded perspectives. However, there continues to be an overrepresentation of men at senior leadership positions across the Indian Social Sector. According to a survey of 328 organizations held in 2015 by Dasra[2], women comprised close to 53% of employees across designations in all the Social Purpose organizations surveyed, but only 34% of them were in managerial positions and only 19% of Social Purpose Organizations in the country are led by women.

In ILSS's efforts to understand the complexity of women's leadership in the social sector, this research aims to (a) Test hypotheses on the gaps, challenges with sector leaders passionate about women leadership, emerging women leaders and organizations in the sector (b) Capture best practices, policies and processes which contribute to supporting women achieve leadership roles (c) Explore the scope of an intervention aimed at building the capacities of emerging women leaders, and finally, (d) Identify possible support structures for building the capacities and capabilities of SPOs (Social Purpose organizations), to support women's leadership in the sector.

Drawing from 46 interactions with leaders and mid-career women in social sector from across the sector, our research highlights the unique challenges that emerging women leaders constantly grapple with, as well as demonstrated solutions proposed to reduce the current gap in the leadership positions in the sector. Through this report, we also examine the most pressing needs for these women leaders, focused on capacity building, which have further informed the proposed intervention of the ILSS Women's Leadership Program.

We believe this study is an important step to build conducive pathways for more women professionals to reach leadership positions, and for social sector organizations to emerge as spaces where we see leadership thrive irrespective of gender. ⬛

[1] World Economic Forum. (July, 2022). Global Gender Gap Report

[2] Dasra. (March, 2016). In Sight: Why grant-making in India needs a Gender Lens.

Foreword

A long-standing cliché about India has been how the country defies easy definition – it is simultaneously advanced and backward, rich and poor, it has some of the brightest technological, scientific, literary, cultural minds and yet, a substantial percentage of its people live in absolute poverty. Where women are concerned, and more specifically where women and work are concerned, the picture is equally perplexing. As this report notes, statistics on women's workforce participation rate have been seeing a disturbing decline in recent years. At the same time, women are increasingly visible in different kinds of professions, and their presence in newer forms of 'work' and self-employment (hostess industries, security, beauty parlours) is worth noting. How do we make sense of these seemingly contradictory realities?

This report opens up some of the questions that arise in relation to women's work, their continuing precarity because of the social and economic context in which they are placed, their relative absence in leadership positions, and in doing so, allows us to also look at the challenges women are confronted with and what may be done to overcome these. Its focus on mid-career women in the formal sector is important in that it is these women who will be the leaders of tomorrow and as things stand, they are the ones who are under-represented in managerial positions. In choosing this focus, the report also asks: can we think of leadership models in ways that encompass the things women can bring to the workplace and in doing so, can we transform the very idea of leadership itself such that it becomes more inclusive, empathetic and whole? While this is something that can be brought into existing workplaces, and can and should become an integral part of new workplaces, the report points out that it is important to go beyond these steps and address fundamental issues such as curriculum design, pedagogy and the social set up. An additional, and significant emphasis here takes us beyond the larger contextual issues to the

importance of the individual – what can we, as individuals, do to change these realities and might we, as individuals be able to learn from the ways in which we may already be playing leadership roles not only at work but beyond, in our daily lives, in our homes? In other words, while structural and systemic change provides the foundation for change, it is the individual who gives meaning and depth to that change.

These are important inputs for us to take with us as we journey into a future with a vision of workplaces that will be more diverse and inclusive and where gender, caste, class will no longer be the bases for discrimination. This report is a first and important step in this direction and forms a logical knowledge input into the courses on leadership, and more specifically on gender-based leadership, in the social sector that ILSS has put in place.

URVASHI BUTALIA
Founder,
Zubaan Books, writer, publisher & activist

INDIA LEADERS FOR SOCIAL SECTOR

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"The main question we need to ask is 'Are we building organizations that value women?'. If the organization isn't wired to leverage feminine styles of leadership, women will continue to struggle to 'fit in' and run into barriers in attaining their full natural potential."

Sudha Srinivasan,
CEO, The Nudge Centre for Social Innovation

The conditions and situations which enable the growth of a woman's leadership journey in the Indian social sector is complex, and multifaceted. This research is focused on explicating the key challenges women face when embarking on this leadership journey, at three key levels: the self, the organization, and the broader sectoral ecosystem. Through an analysis of these challenges, this research presents a set of cohesive recommendations to enhancing the chances of women accessing senior leadership positions in the sector.

As a result of the study, we learned that several unique factors come into play when it comes to impeding women's growth towards leadership positions in the sector. These include:

- Consistent self doubt, which is often the cumulative result of social & cultural rhetoric women experience through their journeys. These self-limiting judgments are further enhanced due to the absence of adequate empathetic support structures, which are critical for women to navigate their career, especially through life milestones such as marriage and becoming a parent.

Executive Summary

- Lack of capacity building training focused on building key leadership skills that are tailored to women's experiences, including assertive communication, conflict resolution and networking skills.
- Absence of formalized mentorship and coaching support for emerging women leaders, to guide them in making strategic career decisions.

**Through these discussions, we have identified a series of recommendations which are likely to support a woman's career trajectory in the social sector.
These include:**

- Skill building and capacity building modules through a program that supports emerging women leaders to discover their inner self along with strengthening their leadership skills.
- One on one or small group coaching and mentoring to support navigating one's career trajectory.
- Building a community of women leaders in the sector, where one can discuss and build knowledge on how to navigate and succeed in this space.
- Supporting Social Purpose organizations to enhance their policies and processes to ensure women's leadership journeys are sustained through their career trajectories.
- Collaborating with ecosystem enablers including funders on shaping the demand for women in leadership and diverse roles.

This research has highlighted a number of underlying individual and systemic conflicts which disproportionately affect women's leadership journeys, as opposed to those of men. Through the synthesis of the key impediments, and an analysis of possible interventions, this report hopes to be a catalyst to platform the needs of emerging women leaders, and co-create innovative solutions to enhance a woman's leadership journey. w

Introduction

Having gender diversity is at the root of increased productivity, greater innovation, higher employee retention and satisfaction.

The reality is however starkly different. Data over the past few years suggests that urban women professionals are exiting the workforce, despite better educational qualifications and a growing Indian economy. Research conducted by Dasra suggests that when women are entering the workforce, they are entering an unequal landscape; an ecosystem that has been traditionally structured for men to succeed.[3] This deeply rooted inequity calls for an understanding of the interrelatedness of the various factors that impact women's leadership and success in the social sector. This research report will highlight some of the key barriers women in the Indian social sector experience, as well as possible measures to counteract these barriers to support their leadership journey. Ranging from upskilling opportunities, formalized sectoral mentorship, to organizational policy and ecosystem level suggestions, this report will highlight avenues which can be strengthened to positively shape women's experiences at the workplace, and to unleash the potential of India's women in the social sector.

Aligned with our continued effort to strengthen the effectiveness of Indian Social Purpose Organizations (SPOs), ILSS has conducted a holistic research project to better understand the nuances of women's leadership in the sector.

Drawing on those insights, this research report will explore various types of detriments women experience whilst on their leadership journey, and investigate the root of those problems. Following that, the report will explore to what extent different interventions may circumvent those effects, and explore strategies for change. w

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[3] Dasra. (March, 2016). In Sight: Why grant-making in India needs a Gender Lens.

Research Objective and Methodology

The first step in the research study was to conduct a literature review of relevant publications (including academic papers, independent research studies by foundations and intermediary organizations) on current status of women leadership across SPOs in the Indian social sector. There are many overarching themes which impact women's leadership across sectors, and so literature on women's leadership broadly was analysed.

The literature review was followed up by in-depth interviews with 31 stakeholders covering a range of stakeholders picked through convenience sampling which included emerging women leaders, women in leadership positions, organization leaders, gender specialists, ecosystem builders etc.

This study highlights the needs of women in mid-career positions, who have 8-15 years of work experience. The focus on this segment of women leaders was deliberate, as there is a lack of detailed research and support on their experiences of leadership. This segment aspires to hold senior leadership roles in the next 5-8 years, and are therefore at a pivotal moment in their leadership journey. At the same time, their access to leadership programs and incubators is more limited than women in senior leadership positions.

The interviewees are situated at a range of organizations in the sector, most of which are mid- to large-sized. Interviewees represented a number of functions across their organizations, including fundraising, program & partnership management, and policy development.

The report also draws from a survey, which with 46 responses, engages with the varied demographics & fields across the sector, and creates a crucial set of quantitative data to understand women's perspectives.

15 interviews were conducted with senior sector leaders, to gain a deeper insight into the nature of women's leadership in the sector from a bird's-eye perspective.

These insights constructed a holistic picture of the sector, outlining its nuances, and what possible contributors may be to the current status of women's leadership. (See full List of interviewees in Appendix A)

The findings and recommendations shared in this report are generated from the cumulative data and information we collected from our interviews, survey, benchmarking research on identifying the best practices, barriers, pain points, and potential areas of support for the Indian SPOs, and broader academic and social research on women's leadership. w

The following report showcases the results of the research study.

Key Insights on the State of Women's Leadership in the Social Sector

1.1

Balancing Personal and Professional Trajectories

A prominent theme in the research is the difficulty women experience in balancing their personal and professional responsibilities. The social and cultural expectations placed on women in this demographic is often centered around the belief that the family and family responsibilities, must come before one's career. The extent of one's family responsibilities may change during this period including elder care, marriage and child care.

Several interviewees cited a continued difficulty in navigating their professional journey alongside their family responsibilities; this is most evident in the repeatedly mentioned statement that a woman's career growth phase intersects with socially normative years of getting married, and having children. 'Not being married' or 'Having no children' was cited as one of the major reasons for career advancement and achievement by several women respondents.

Those with additional familial responsibilities, in particular, discussed the difficulty in balancing those needs with the increasing work expectations, as they are promoted to more senior roles. "The mid-career women have additional responsibilities at home - which includes marriage, child and/ or elderly care, home making, etc. These traditional roles in the family are not shifting; at the same time, you're expected to be performing and delivering at work", states **Jyotsna Siddharth,** the Country Director at Gender at Work, India.

The social expectations placed on women is also a key factor in how women perceive their own responsibilities. The overrepresentation of the perfect woman, one who can perfectly handle their work and family tasks, contributes to respondents feeling daunted by the social image of how women should be at home and at workspaces. As one respondent

states, "I have to be the perfect mother, I have to be the perfect wife / daughter in law, my responsibility is towards my home as much as / before my work, etc.", when juggling their career responsibilities.

61.4% of respondents believe that the lack of adequate family and childcare support is a key barrier to achieving their leadership goals.

Some respondents mentioned sharing household responsibilities with their partners as a key factor in being able to focus on their careers. In 'The Moment of Lift', Melinda Gates argues that both men and women are capable of developing various qualities equally. Similar to women, men are also capable of being effective caregivers and capable homemakers. Since women continue taking these roles exclusively, it limits men's abilities being developed for these roles. Noted economist Diane Elson developed a three-part framework to shrink the gap between the time men spend on unpaid work and the time women spend on it. She called it the 3 Rs: recognize, reduce, redistribute.[5]

According to the latest National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) Time Use Survey, 6 done in 2019 by the Government of India, the average time women were spending on unpaid domestic service for the household members was three times that of men.

Alongwith, the average time spent by women on unpaid caregiving services for household members was nearly double that of men. A commitment to equitable division of household and domestic responsibilities is essential to enable women to focus on their leadership journey. W

[5] Elson, D. (2017), as cited in Gates, M. (2019). The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World. Flatiron Books.

[6] Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. (2020). NSS Report: Time Use in India- 2019: January- December 2019)

1.2

Disproportionate Involvement of Women Leaders across the Sector

"Women at technical, programme and management levels are deeply underrepresented in some thematic areas in the sector. Embracing diversity & equity in these sectoral areas is yet to take on a deliberate and focussed priority. In many ways, the social sector is at a similar juncture where the private sector was 20 years ago – a little tentative, in uncharted territory, seeking solutions."

Reshma Anand,
Former CEO, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

[a] Existence of a leaky pipeline

The term 'leaky pipeline' broadly refers to the phenomenon of a disproportionately fewer number of women, or those from minority backgrounds as one moves up an organizational hierarchy. In the context of the Indian social sector, one of the key connections is to the comparatively large number of women at entry and mid-level positions and yet the lack of many women at senior leadership positions. **66% of organizations in the sector have an under-representation of women at managerial positions; this gap only becomes wider, as the organization grows.**[7] Research shows that the leaky pipeline is associated with gender bias and discrimination through both overt and covert mechanisms which create an environment which is unsustainable for women to succeed in.

[b] Lack of access to non-program roles

A recurring theme in our interviews is that, while we spoke to women in a range of different verticals across their organization, there is an overrepresentation of women in certain organizational spaces, namely Programmatic roles. Multiple senior leaders also stated that there are likely to be more women in organizations oriented around education and healthcare than for example in policy. Jyotsna Siddharth, Country Director at Gender at Work India, describes this as a condition of women being relegated to roles which involve 'care work' or direct work with beneficiaries, as women are represented as more 'caring'.

The extension of this phenomenon is that women are less likely to be integrated into cross-functional roles, including in the areas of strategic development, operations, and fundraising. Senior leaders also cited the lack of women in senior leadership roles has a cumulative effect on strategic direction of the sector; this is most evident in the lack of women funders, women representation on trustee boards, and as leadership on large, international institutions. W

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[7] Dasra. (March, 2016). In Sight: Why grant-making in India needs a Gender Lens.

1.3

Unpacking Dominant Leadership Models in the Sector, and the Traits that are Prioritized

Multiple social sector leaders stated that leadership models in the sector must hold traits such as empathy, inclusion, and justice, at its center. This includes not only ensuring your work is aligned with the mission of the social sector, but as a leader, you also lead with equity, inclusivity, respect and kindness.

Respondents repeatedly cited a few key leadership traits they have or want to, integrate into their leadership style; these include clear communication, being highly adaptable to different roles, challenging one's own limitations and boundaries, and highlighting the necessity for collaboration.

However, respondents cited that these leadership traits and styles are often undervalued in the workplace. For instance, many respondents acknowledged facing challenges with identifying their voice and their core leadership styles. Where they wanted to have a safe space to be able to express their vulnerabilities, they felt penalized for breaking

"The nature of the work in the Social sector requires a different approach, including empathy over efficiency and it requires a more holistic skill set and values frame."

Ingrid Srinath,
CEO, Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy

down or showing emotions - traits that men are socialized to hide. Alternatively, more traditional leadership styles, those which center traits such as competitiveness and aggression are more highly valued. Respondents stated that this style is typically exercised by men, but even when it is done so by women, they are seen as 'aggressive' instead of 'assertive'.

In The Moment of Lift, Melinda Gates highlights how gender is at the core of all its work at the Gates Foundation. Building gender transformational spaces calls out for bringing the qualities of both men and women together in the workplaces. Countries and organizations running by the leadership style 'to exclude' will not flourish– unless they change their leadership style, Melinda adds. **"In order to build an egalitarian workspace, women must leave the margins and take their place; not above men or below them, but beside them; at the center of society, adding their voices and making the decisions"[8]**
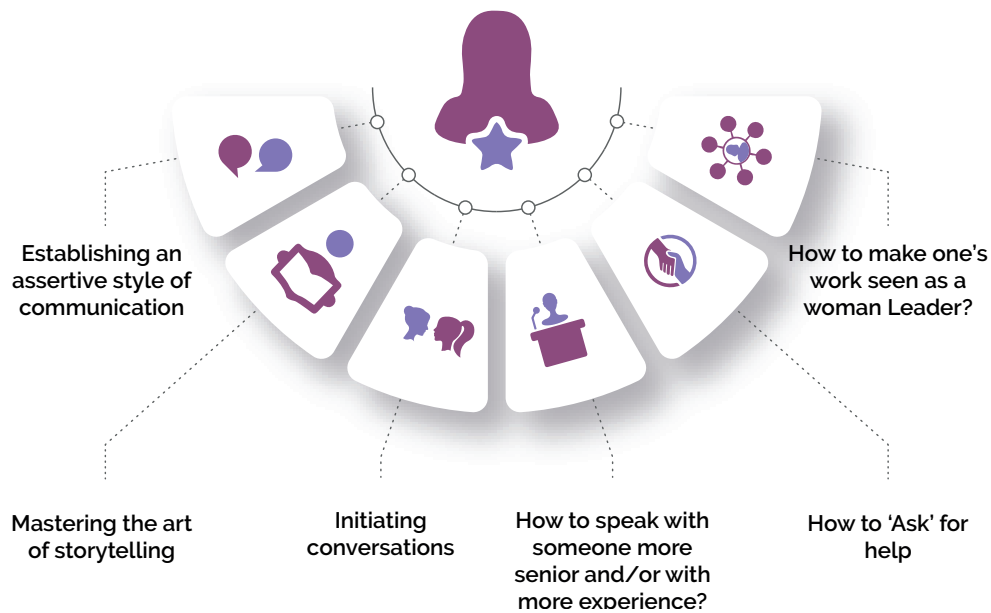
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[8] Gates, M. (2019). The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World. Flatiron Books

1.4

Challenges Women Face in their Journey Towards Leadership

Some challenges that the respondents articulated include:

[a] Strengthening Communication:
Respondents state having difficulties in finding their voice and their leadership style. This includes:

Establishing an assertive style of communication

How to make one's work seen as a woman Leader?

Mastering the art of storytelling

Initiating conversations

How to speak with someone more senior and/or with more experience?

How to 'Ask' for help

"Our socio-cultural and religious context, especially the pervasive patriarchal view of what is the 'right role of girls and women', shapes behaviors and thinking of people from an early age"

Pritha Venkatachalam,
Partner & Co-Head Asia and Africa, The Bridgespan Group

[b] Imposter Syndrome:

A continued sense of self-doubt, and self-limiting bias, is stated to be one of the key hindrances to our respondents leadership journeys. Imposter Syndrome is a product of social and cultural conditioning, wherein an individual questions if they deserve or are equipped to handle certain responsibilities and roles.

Our research revealed 50% of women respondents feel slowed down by their self-limiting biases, some of which were defined by some external messages they received through their journey.

Srilatha Batliwala in her book "All About Power" helps understand the three faces of power: the visible, invisible and the hidden forms and how power equations are challenged in the process of highlighting injustices. Emphasizing hidden and indirect power, Batliwala describes how this kind of a power reproduces gender discrimination and other biases within families and clans.

Respondents shared a few of their childhood instances where the treatment they received as a girl was different from that of a boy child. Most of these women mentioned are impacted by these biases, and often continue to carry them. For instance, teaching the gendered social norms to boys to be tough and brave and the daughters for the 'good-girl' behaviour, controlling daughters' choice of dressing and girls being called more for support with the household chores, etc. The continued impact these limitations have on one's career and leadership journey is the reluctance to aspire for more senior positions, or be relegated to a role which doesn't match one's potential. In cases where respondents stated they were able to exit the cycle of Imposter Syndrome, they cited the support of their line manager and wider organizational culture as the biggest factors in doing so.

[c] Existing Socio-Cultural Patriarchal Biases

There continues to be structural and systemic biases which shade how women in the social sector are perceived by the wider sector, and beyond. One part of this is the way women's authority and legitimacy is undervalued by male colleagues; respondents cite that even when they are the most senior member in a meeting questions may be directed to male members in the room for confirmation. Some respondents cite that even if their organization is supportive of women's leadership journeys, their interactions with external stakeholders ranging from government officials to funders are often shaded with patriarchal biases leading to limitations in how they are viewed in their sector.

Another key area where biases are manifested is in how workplace policies are designed and structured. This is most evident in the fact that there is a national maternity leave policy of 26 weeks, but an evident absence of a robust paternal leave policy. This not only leaves women to take care of the child care responsibilities single handedly, but also leaves them worried about their futures when they join back their organization post a 6 month gap. So that her hiring as a woman professional doesn't come across as a 'liability' because of her maternity leave, many women respondents reported that they often feel like they need to work whilst on leave, so as to maintain their reputation and standing in their organization as a productive employee. With

"I feel the lack of equitable pay and the discomfort women leaders face when pursuing advocacy or policy matters in government spaces are today's biggest systemic hurdles of women in the social sector."

Tara Singh Vachani,
Executive Chairperson of Antara Senior Living, and Vice Chairperson of Max India Limited

no structured policies to support women returning to work post their maternity leaves was also heard as one of the common worries in most of these women respondents.
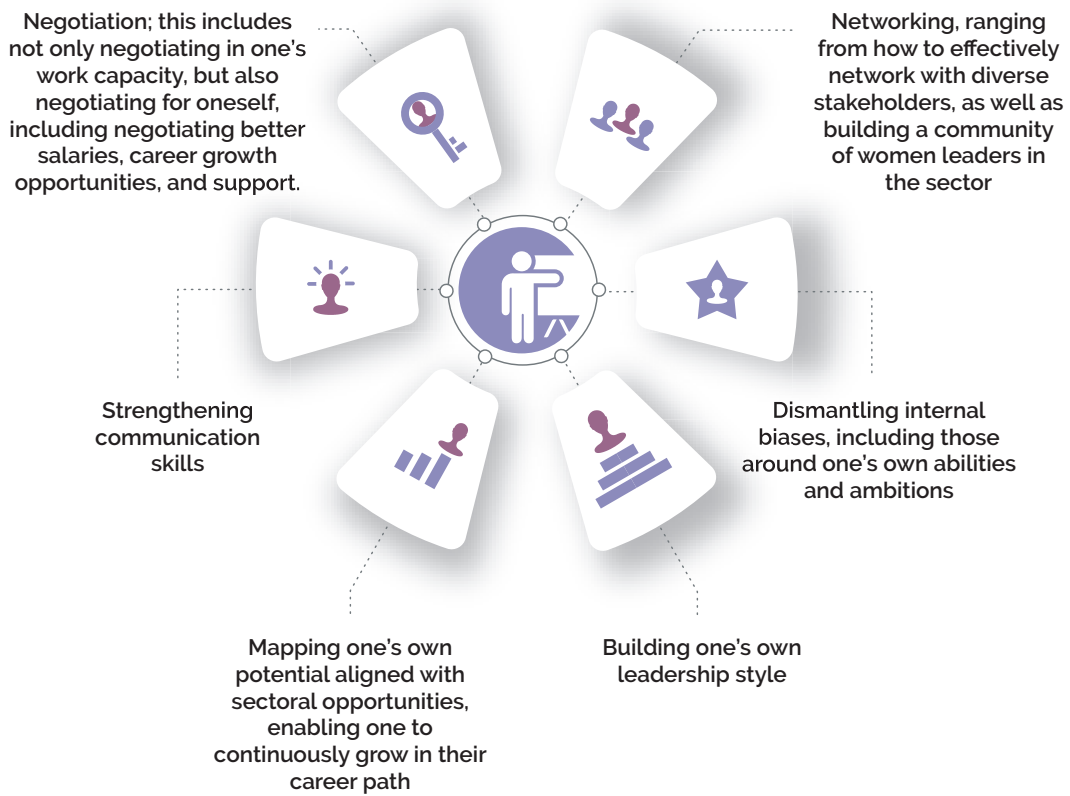
"The 'Invisible Power' is in many ways the most problematic of all the faces of power- because of its nature of being invisible",[9] adds Batliwala. This is because it is used as one of the most powerful forces behind propagating and creating certain kinds of Ideologies. Once the ideologies around 'right-wrong' or 'normal-abnormal' are created, it becomes extremely difficult to change the discrimination and disempowerment that it creates within a social group. This might also include girls being brought up in a way to accept male superiority (in other words, the patriarchal ideology). Along with a focus on challenging the visible powers, like changing laws or creating women-friendly policies at the organization levels, it is the hidden or invisible powers as above, that often have a greater impact on discrimination faced by women. In order to create a permanent change in power structures revealing and dismantling these invisible forces is essential.

As a way of asserting her inner source of power, women need to start asking for what they want. This will definitely act as a catalyst to create a workplace culture that expands opportunities for women and promotes diversity.

As Tara Singh Vachani, Executive Chairperson of Antara Senior Living and Vice Chairperson of Max India Limited, highlights, effective leadership skills need to be learnt by both men and women equally. However, it is essential for women leaders to effectively voice their concerns in a constructive and productive way.

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[9] Batliwala, S. (2019). All About Power: Understanding Social Power and Power Structures. CREA.

[d] Lack of Sufficient Capacity Building Training in the Areas:

Negotiation; this includes not only negotiating in one's work capacity, but also negotiating for oneself, including negotiating better salaries, career growth opportunities, and support.

Networking, ranging from how to effectively network with diverse stakeholders, as well as building a community of women leaders in the sector

Strengthening communication skills

Dismantling internal biases, including those around one's own abilities and ambitions

Mapping one's own potential aligned with sectoral opportunities, enabling one to continuously grow in their career path

Building one's own leadership style

In their book 'How Women Rise', Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith outline the stark differences in the way men and women think, say and do at their workplaces. These include women's workplace characteristics like "Reluctance in claiming one's achievements", "Rebelling the thought of engaging others to help them meet either specific or long term career goals", "A resolve to master the details of their job as compared to making connections for making their jobs successful", "Riveting on details because of a strong desire to be perfect- hence distracting them from the big picture orientation that is expected when one reaches a senior position".[10] While honing their management skills in order to help their overall team perform better is important in the way women work, the men on the other hand work hard in building strong outside networks, which is in a way aimed at getting recognition for the larger organization. Hence, upskilling women in the above mentioned leadership traits is a critical need for the emerging women leaders.

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[10] Sally, H., & Marshall, G. (2018). How Women Rise: Break the 12 Habits holding you Back from your Next Raise, Promotion, or Job. Hachette Books.

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"Women don't negotiate for themselves as strongly as men do – and this is sector agnostic. Men, on average, are more comfortable defending their work and demanding greater voice, whereas women just aren't. On top of that, research shows that when women are more forceful, they are viewed as unnecessarily "aggressive", and hence face greater pushback and lower success in their negotiations"

Aakanksha Gulati,
Director
ACT Grants

1.5

Senior Women Leaders in the Sector

Throughout our study, much appreciation was highlighted for senior women leaders who have made significant impact in their area of work.

As **Sohini Bhattacharya,** CEO - Breakthrough, India states, "Women often don't become leaders because the narrative that 'I can't be a leader is built for them early on." To break that cycle, it is imperative to highlight inspiring women leaders in the social sector.

Through the following section, we highlight some of these leaders:

Shaheen Mistri,
CEO
Teach For India

Most of our workplaces are still largely a function of how men operate. They are designed for and by men. Some of this was broken by Teach For India. With her bold convictions and being comfortable building something that looks different, Shaheen has created an extremely nurturing environment at TFI. Teach For India also has a larger representation of women at the leadership positions when compared to the sector averages.

Dr. Armida Fernandez,
Founder Trustee
SNEHA

Dr. Fernandez highlighted her visionary skills in succession planning for her organization, and passing leadership onto an inspiring woman leader in the sector, Vanessa D'Souza. In doing so, Dr. Fernandez build a pipeline for inclusive leadership at SNEHA, an inspiring commitment for our respondents.

Safeena Hussain,
Founder & Board Member
Educate Girls

Safeena grew her organization from scratch as soon as she quit her job back in the US. With a sense of strong self belief, she started working on a concept she is passionate about - girls' education. Her knowledge, skills, and drive has been crucial in the growth of Educate Girls, and it's array of achievements.

Priya Agarwal
Founder
Antarang

Antarang's COVID response under the leadership of their founder, Priya, served as a huge contributor to the sector. Stemming from their belief in building equitable careers and futures for everyone; Priya and her team provided internet data packs for students to continue their online classes, telephone counseling for adolescents and young adults, mental health training and resilience building for frontline staff, and job placement for young adults and their families.

Naina Subberwal Batra,
CEO
AVPN

Naina's leadership has created a nurturing environment for the AVPN community, growing the membership base by more than 4x since the last nine years. She has also been instrumental in developing some of the most innovative services, like the collaborative pooled funds; with a collective focus on supporting the entire ecosystem of social investors, including catalytic philanthropists to impact investors and corporate CSR professionals. In 2021, she was featured in the list of Asia's Most Influential by Tatler Asia and in 2019, awarded one of Asia's Top Sustainability Superwomen by CSRWorks.

Key traits highlighted by interviewees displayed by this group of senior women leaders include their ability to stay committed to their vision and mission, displaying an empathetic leadership style, and strategic management skills. Platforming senior women leaders is crucial, as interviewees cited the inspiration they provided, as well as representing multiple different career pathways in the social sector. A recurrent theme revolves around the importance of listening to and learning from how senior leaders navigated difficult periods and decisions in their career, and seeking advice on how to do the same. Respondents report feeling isolated when faced with making decisions on balancing their personal and professional life, and cite the helpfulness of hearing senior leaders be open about their journeys.

1.6

A Demand for Capacity Building, Upskilling and Networking Spaces, for Emerging Women Leaders in the Sector

A persistent demand of upskilling and capacity building training was highlighted in conversations with emerging women leaders. The journey to the leadership position can be exciting, yet difficult, and many respondents struggled with making their presence felt in their organizations. Due to a scarcity of women role models, several interviewees were also unsure on how to eventually reach the CXO level, how to acquire strategic thinking skills and are therefore interested in mentoring and guidance opportunities.

Along with building key managerial and introspective skills, 75.6% of respondents have cited the desire to build their own leadership style. Respondents have consistently heralded leadership styles which center empathy, collaboration and inclusion. Crucially, these traits are often incongruous with dominant leadership styles present in the sector, which as one respondent states, "the current models of leadership are largely informed by the context of corporate leadership which may not work in social settings".

James V. Downton successfully articulated the term 'Transformational Leadership', as an alternate form of leadership style, "where one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality."[11] This alternate form of leadership needs to include negotiating inter-personal

and collective processes differently, and possibly more effectively by building trustworthiness, autonomy and emotional intelligence.

Benefits of being led by different forms of leadership were further confirmed during our interviews. The women respondents who had empathetic leaders, reported receiving scaffolded support and orientation towards preparing them for their next leadership roles. Infact, a strong woman senior manager often served as a role model. Respondents found a scope and culture about being honest with their strengths and areas of improvement in a culture created by a senior woman leader in an organization.

Moreover, it is crucial to build an atmosphere of support for women across the sector. As one respondent states, "presently there is more of competition than collaboration amongst the women community, which gets detrimental in lesser women rising to positions of accomplishments. Helping create safe spaces / role models / women mentors to understand and support women might be of great assistance for women to achieve leadership positions."

"People are often blinded to gender aspects and need to be constantly reminded to make it a habit. Gendered dynamics has always been there; need people to discuss this through with (both those who have the same experience, and those who don't)"

Luis Miranda,
Co-Founder, ISPP / Chairman, CORO

11 Downton, J.V. (1973), as cited in Gates, M. (2019). The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World. Flatiron Books.

1.7

Existing Organizations Working towards Building Capacity for Women Leaders

With an understanding of the above felt needs for the emerging women leaders, we undertook research to understand ongoing efforts that various organizations and programs (both within India, and globally) offer, in order to support women's leadership. Some of the present offerings include:

- **Timshel** through their work in promoting Diversity and Inclusion in the social sector, have developed their own framework to build an integrated approach towards providing career support to women professionals in the sector. Timshel's programs enable women leaders to overcome some common obstacles they face in their journey towards leadership roles, and empower them to operate from a place of choice, strength and resilience.

- Through all their programs, **Gender at Work** works towards creating a world that values and respects women's human rights and cultures of equality. Guided by their Analytical Framework, their programs focus on an analysis of power dynamics between individuals and institutions, and question how to navigate workplace policies and processes, and culture, through a feminst lens. Some of their programs include:

  - **Feminist Leadership Lab** is a 7 day residential exploratory convening of young leaders and activists to meet others doing similar and different work, engage with what feminist leadership might look like in participants' respective context along with co-creating tools within the space to lead, to rest, and to rejuvenate
  - The 2-day **Feminist leadership course** was designed for those in management and leadership roles, to understand how they could drive change in their own organizations and advance gender equality and inclusion. The course is also developed to help discern the underlying reasons that lead to the incidents of sexual harassment at the workplace.

- The annual residential program at **Feminist Leadership, Movement Building, and Rights Institute** by **Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action (CREA)** offers training program for women working and/or leading grassroots, community movements in India. The program aims to deepen the participant's feminist lens and develop a network of grassroots feminist activists working with communities and/or leading movements.
- The **Women on Boards** program by **ISDM**, is a 3 months intensive program designed for women with 15+ years of experience with a desire to learn about, serve in board positions and influence social impact organizations. The program is open for women working in any professional sector, including corporate, academic, social sector or entrepreneurship. The ISDM program also offers mentorship and support during the first year to enable a smooth transition for the senior women leaders into the board role in SPOs.
- In collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation, a 1 day webinar organized by **Arthan** served as a guide to understanding the challenges and opportunities pertaining to Women's Leadership in the Development Sector.
- **Shakti - The Empathy Project** is an incubation program for women entrepreneurs in the early stage of their startups, working towards finding solutions to social problems. The program is envisioned to essentially empower women social entrepreneurs.

There are a number of other women's leadership programs, which are focused outwith the social sector, or for international areas. Some of these include:

- **Women's Leadership Program** by **Indian School of Business** is a program designed to help mid to senior level women professionals in the corporate sector, to overcome the unique organizational hurdles and biases that restrict their growth, and equip them with the tools they need to increase their influence and impact, as they transition into senior roles.

- **Tanmatra - Women in Leadership program** offered by **IIM Bangalore** is a cross-industry leadership development programme, designed for women professionals with 15+ years of experience to advance them in the Indian business community.
- **Feminist Leadership Program** by **Fair Share of Women Leaders** is an online exploration journey. Through a series of webinars, the participants discover what Feminist Leadership can look like in practice from a range of perspectives like authenticity, accountability, sisterhood, process design and power dynamics.
- **The Women Leaders Program** by **INSEAD** offers a 4-days Online program for an elite group of women business leaders with 15+ years of experience. The program is offered for women who have already been identified as high-potential leaders and have used that opportunity to their advantage - are seeking to enhance their leadership skills, and demonstrate strong drive to reach the top of their organization.
- **The Women Leadership Development Program by Oxford University** is an online program designed to better equip women with the tools to navigate challenges and gender biases within the workplace, and develop the critical leadership skills to effectively guide, influence, and mentor others.
- **Women in Leadership** offered by **Harvard University** is an online program for young women leaders, with an experience of 3-7 years. The program supports these young women professionals with building strategic focus, communication skills, negotiation and building productive relationships at their workplaces.

It is evident that through this research, there remains a gap in capacity building programs focused on mid-career professionals within the social sector. The focus on this segment of the workforce is crucial, as it will not only support their own leadership journey into senior roles, but will have the continued impact that women in senior leadership roles have on the sector, including greater representation, inspiration for younger women, as well as having increased power in the organization to improve policies and processes to support women. We envisage this space as one with skill building opportunities, mentorship access, centered around building a community of support for women in the Indian social sector.

1.8

Insights and Suggestions on the Design and Curriculum for a Women's Leadership Program

The following section shares interviewees' and expert inputs on initiatives that could address challenges that the emerging women leaders in the sector face, vis a vis building effective leadership capacities for themselves, as well as for building effective ecosystem support structures in the sector. These outline a broad frame for a potential program developed exclusively for "Emerging Women Leaders in India's Social Sector"

Additionally, Interviewees shared potential topics for Leadership intervention that these Emerging Women leaders could benefit from. These are synthesized in the following page:

Developing Inner Core Capacities and Self Belief	• Leveraging one's strengths and building resilience • Becoming aware of one's judgements and self limiting biases • Combatting imposter syndrome • Interrogating prevalent biases hindering women's leadership
Capacity Building and Upskilling	• Leading with empathy, compassion and persuasion and building one's unique voice • Learning to influence through verbal and non verbal communication • Building assertiveness • Building negotiation skills • Art of storytelling • Networking skills within and beyond the organization • Understanding and articulating one's leadership style and building one's personal brand • Conflict resolution including, giving and receiving constructive feedback
Creating Safe Spaces to Listen & Share	• Listening to success stories of senior women leaders from the sector– learning from senior women role models in the sector • Building spaces where women can discuss the nuances of personal and professional life; a space to explore similarities in experiences and a feeling of 'I am not alone' • Build continued support structures for each other as Emerging Women leaders.
Mentoring and Guidance	• A small group or one on one guidance from an industry coach and/or senior woman leader in the sector • Guidance to seek professional growth opportunities and build a development plan to prepare for the next steps in one's career. • Having sponsorships and/or buddy system
Organizational Level Support	• Getting exposure to industry relevant training • Receiving opportunities for taking up cross functional and strategic projects, roles and responsibilities • Opportunities to make one's work visible and opportunities to present at public events • Helping one understand her leadership style • Culture and mindset shifts by building strong gender policies, along with facilitating the internalization and implementation at the organizational level • Flexible policies to support women professionals to continue • Working following a break, due to marriage, childbirth, or any other circumstance.

"An inherent aspect of leadership is evaluating risks and rewards, and making choices. Some of these choices may lead to failures or losses. Learning to manage risks and failures with humility and dispassion, looking back and with poise and confidence looking ahead, is important. Emerging women leaders may benefit from focused mentoring on managing risks and failures and viewing them as natural stepping stones in their leadership journeys."

Srikanth Viswanathan,
CEO, Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

"Equipping the young women leaders to be comfortable in their skin: aware of and be able to make considered decisions based on their situation/ requirements; help letting go of the patriarchal biases women are unconsciously conditioned to carry in their heads; providing mentors/ role models and the support system & guidance to have critical & honest conversations; strengthen self-confidence, and helping women own their space are some of the themes for building capacity building interventions for a Woman leadership intervention to be successful"

Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja,
CEO and MD, Central Square Foundation

Recommendations and Provocations for a Capacity Building Intervention, and the Larger Role ILSS could play to Support Emerging Women Leaders in the Sector

In analyzing the data collected through this research process, along with evaluating best practice mechanisms to support women's leadership globally, this section will highlight possible interventions to remove barriers, and consider the need for a capacity building program to enhance women's leadership journeys in the Indian social sector.

2.1

Capacity Building through an ILSS Women's Leadership Program

84.1% of respondents stated they believed a capacity building program focused on themes discussed through this report would enhance their leadership journeys. To ensure the highest impact from a capacity building program, it would need to integrate topics which not only situate the nature of women's leadership in a wider social and cultural context, including unpacking the underlying sources of barriers in the Indian social sector, but also provide opportunities for skill building, networking, and platforming each other. These capacity building modules need to be facilitated in order to support the women leaders to explore both their inner and outer self by pausing and reconnecting with oneself, one's purpose and one's resilience.

"All About Power" strongly emphasizes on relying and building the inner core capacities as women leaders. As Batliwala writes, "Power within is also an intangible resource, something hard to explain but also impossible for anyone to capture or take away."[12] Therefore, it is imperative for emerging women leaders to tap into inner sources of power, in order to transform power structures in the workplace. Many respondents are already relying on their personal characteristics, in order to succeed in their careers. Qualities like "a determination to counter and question gender biases", "pushing oneself and not giving up, even when the external environment was not conducive", "standing my ground and saying 'NO' when required", and "moving beyond my comfort and actively seeking mentorship outside my organization" were some responses we received.

Nevertheless, the capacity building programs offered by Timshel, advocate and enable strengthening one's 'Outer self' by understanding and articulating one's leadership style and brand, and hence help the women leaders to create the desired impact for themselves.

To ensure a Women's Leadership Capacity Building Program is holistic, ILSS is inclined to co-create the program collaborating with sector leader organizations including Timshel and others. W

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12 Batliwala, S. (2019). All About Power: Understanding Social Power and Power Structures. CREA.

2.2

Mentoring and Networking Support for Women Leaders in the Sector

The importance of mentorship is a key factor in this work, with 72.7% of respondents stating they believed mentorship would support their leadership journey. Mentorship, by a senior woman leader in the sector, is described to have the positive impact of not only helping guide women in navigating their career, but also open the space to have discussions on topics women cite experiencing, but have no one to speak to about. This includes discussing the difficulties in balancing one's personal and professional responsibilities, covert experiences of bias in the workplace, as well as broader themes. By opening this space for discussion between women in the sector, we believe it will invite the wider sector to discuss these nuanced experiences more holistically.

Similarly, the importance of networking, and having access to a community of women predicated on supporting each other's leadership journeys, emerged as a key theme from the research. 72.7% of respondents believe that having a supportive peer network of women would support their leadership journey's. This will not contribute to building a wider space for discussing key issues which impact women's leadership journeys in the sector, as well as act as a space where women can strategize for change, and share best practice mechanisms for support. The ILSS intervention in this domain could be a series of webinars, panel discussions and arranging networking forums for women on a long term basis. These discussions or forums could be run in collaboration with existing organizations, already working on building and delivering mentorship schemes for other segments of professional women, including Gender at Work, Women at Bridgespan India and CORO. Mentorship and conversations around the kind of roles available to a woman professional after she returns to the workforce post maternity leave, might leave these women feeling much more empowered in their decision making, both on a personal as well as professional front.

Mentorship and network building can run in parallel with capacity building modules. This could ensure consistent focus on the needs of participants and any other hurdles participants may be facing in implementing the upskilling concepts. Further, dialogues can be initiated at the SPO level in order to support these organizations to generate internal mentorship structures for emerging women leaders at the organizational level. Developing opportunities that allow every professional to serve as an advisor, mentor or sponsor at least once, can be one of the unique ways to ensure some accountability across levels. ◼

"Showcasing the leadership stories of women in the sector would be inspiring"

Ingrid Srinath,
CEO, Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy

2.3

Intervention for SPO Leaders: Creating Empowering Support Structures at an Organizational Level

It is essential that organizations are well-equipped to absorb and support women's leadership journeys. Respondents who have had positive experiences through their career journey refer to organizational support as the most important factor in enabling their success. One key component of this is creating an open culture of discussion around gender issues, and involving men and women in this. As **Bishakha Datta**, Program Lead - Point of View, states *"It is important to build an organizational culture that is not based on one gender - typically what happens is that women form a smaller group and discuss issues they face, but it's never mainstreamed into the wider organization"*. By opening this space of dialogue, women's needs are able to be systematically considered and accounted for by an organization, rather than on a case-by-case basis.

While the forms of discrimination are myriad, the root cause of gender inequality, i.e patriarchy, is the same. Hence, "it's essential that gendered focused work is not just confined to a 'Women and girls' programmatic silo."[13] These conversations need to be integrated with all areas of an organization's working like climate, health, livelihoods, and so on—which may or may not consider how gender inequality is at play at a conscious level. This makes it imperative to have these sensitization conversations to be done both at the individual and generational levels.

SPOs can also nominate and sponsor their emerging women leaders for this program. It can also include having a few open sessions with the sponsors and mentors from within the organization. We envisage this recommendation to lead to an open environment where women build awareness of what they are entitled to and the organizations having a clear understanding of women's requirements; hence leading to determining a healthy and open organizational culture. The discussions can be around:

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[13] Shifman, P. et al. (May, 2022). Lighting the way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements. The Bridgespan Group.

- Exposing the emerging leaders as to what lies ahead and how to determine the next step in her career trajectory
- Training and mentoring of these women in skills that would support reaching the next career level. This can range from strategic management, human resources, operations, financial insights, and more.
- What flexible working policies may be most helpful to implement, if any, to ensure the highest participation from women with personal and familial commitments ꟿ

Conclusion

This report highlights the multifaceted experiences women leaders across the social sector experience. Where there are a number of women leaders carrying out inspiring work, the existence of systematic, social and cultural barriers standing in their way, cannot be denied. Emerging women leaders in the sector face a specific set of challenges in progressing to senior leadership positions, as this report highlights, ranging from lack of clear mentorship opportunities, to experiencing Imposter Syndrome.

There is a clear need for a capacity building intervention which is tailored to the complex experiences of emerging women leaders in the social sector. As per the findings, this would integrate key upskilling opportunities, access to leadership coaches, and the building of a peer community focused on supporting each other's success. This will also include working with the wider sector to build an ecosystem which is prepared to support women's leadership.

The sector, with its commitment to values of inclusivity & justice, has been a key driver in the wider movement towards gender equality. There is continued responsibility to create an environment wherein emerging women leaders are empowered and able to thrive, and there is now an urgent need to do so.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Stakeholders Interviewed

A.1 Experts and Senior leaders from the Social Sector

Name	Designation	Name of the Organization
Aakanksha Gulati	Director	ACT Grants
Bishakha Datta	Program Lead	Point of View
Gayatri Nair Lobo	Chief Operating Officer	ATE Chandra Foundation
Ingrid Srinath	Director	Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy
Jasrita Dhir	Head - Marketing & Communications	Antara Senior Living
Jyotsna Siddharth	Country Director	Gender at Work, India
Luis Miranda	Co-Founder	Indian School of Public Policy & CORO
Pritha Venkatachalam	Partner & Co-Head, Asia and Africa	The Bridgespan Group
Reshma Anand	Former Chief Executive Officer	Hindustan Unilever Foundation
Shaveta Sharma-Kukreja	Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director	Central Square Foundation
Simar Deep Kaur	Head Human Capital	Max India & Antara Senior Living
Sohini Bhattacharya	Chief Executive Officer	Breakthrough, India
Srikanth Viswanathan	Chief Executive Officer	Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy
Sudarshana Kundu	Managing Trustee	Gender at Work, India
Sudha Srinivasan	Chief Executive Officer	The/Nudge Centre for Social Innovation
Tara Singh Vachani	Founder & Executive Chairperson	Antara Senior Care
	Vice Chairperson	Max India Limited

A.2 Mid-Senior career level Women Professionals from the Social Sector

Name	Designation	Name of the Organization
Aditi Nangia	Project Lead, Early Childhood Education	Central Square Foundation
Aishwarya Menon	Lead consultant, Knowledge Impact programs,	Atma Foundation
Amandeep Jhangra	Coordinator, Skill Development	SEWA Bharat
Annie Philip	Lead policy and consultancy	Saahas Zero Waste
Carmeline Fernandes	COO, Operations,	Atma Foundation
Chris Kollian	Lead	Indus Action
Christie Maria James	Implementation Manager	Samhita
Deepthaa Kumar	Vice President, Delivery	Haqdarshak
Etosha Chatterjee	Outreach and partnerships Lead	Waste warriors
Jasleen Kaur	Manager	Bridgespan, India
Madhuri Dhariwal	Associate Director	Indus Action
Mayuri Golambde	Partnerships and Advocacy Lead,	Apni Shala
Misha Nambiar	Regional Academic Excellence Expert	LEAD Schools
Niharika Jindal	Senior Consultant	Svarya
Paramita Mukherjee	Partnership Manager	Enabling leadership
Prachi Luthra	State Lead (Maharashtra & UP)	Aga Khan Foundation
Prachi Taparia	HR Manager	Bridgespan India
Rajashree Sen	Senior Manager, Country Programs	FIND
Sangeetha Vandanan	Associate Director, Fundraising and Communications	SNEHA
Sheetal Lydia Prasad	Manager - Direct Delivery Programme Impact	Dream a Dream
Shilpi Patni	Programs management head, IT	HaqDarshak
Shohini Banerjee	Project Co-Lead, TechSakhi	Point of View
Shomita Bhattacharya	Senior Project Manager	Waste warriors
Shreya Manjarekar	Associate Program Director	SNEHA
Shweta Sudhir	Manager Communications	SNEHA
Smitha Ganesh	Senior Program Manager	Teach For India
Suchitha Balasubramaniam	Comms & Advocacy Manager,	Dream a Dream
Tina Kapoor	Associate Director- Communication & Partnerships	Milaan Foundation
Vaijayanti Kurukundi	Director, Research	Akshara Foundation
Vijayata Verma	Senior Manager - Community Resilience & Climate Action,	EdelGive Foundation
Vrinda Madan	Senior Manager,	TFIx, Teach For India

Appendices

Appendix B: Interview & Survey Questions

B.1 Interview Questions for expert and senior leaders

- What are some of your thoughts on Women Leadership in the Social Sector? How is it different / unique from a broader leadership lens? Is it also specific to 'Women in the social sector'?
- Who are role models that come to your mind when you think about women leaders in the social sector? What makes them a role model?
- What are some of the underlying systemic factors that play a role in the struggles of a Women Leader in the social sector?
- What are your ideas on creating an ecosystem of support for Emerging Women Leaders in the social sector to succeed? What is the role that a program can play? What else would be important?
- What are the K/S/A that are MUST for women to learn for being 'effective leaders' ? What is the inner work that is necessary? What are some skills and competencies that are critical?

B.2 Interview Questions for mid-senior career level women professionals

- Please share with us in brief, your career trajectory and the role you have in your current organization
- In your journey till now; what are some of the factors that have acted as support structures (at an ecosystem, organization and self levels) to help you succeed in leadership roles/ positions/ what you have wanted to do and achieve?
- In your journey till now; what are some of the factors that have acted as Barriers (at an ecosystem, organization and self levels) or something that have made it difficult for you to succeed in leadership roles/ positions/ what you have wanted to do and achieve?
- If we were to develop a program in the domain of capacity building for the emerging women; would you be interested? What are some of the critical upskilling and capacity building factors that you would require?
- What else would you need from such a program? What are some of the mentoring/ guiding/ sponsorship support that you would like to have? Do you have access to it now?
- If you were to join a WLP, would it be online, or in-person? What format interests you most?

B.3 Survey Questionnaires for mid-senior career level women professionals

- What do you think are some of the barriers that prevent women from achieving their leadership goals in the social sector?
- Please describe any other ecosystem-related obstacles that might pose barriers for women to achieve leadership positions, if any.
- Please describe any self-limiting biases that might pose barriers for women to achieve leadership positions, if any.
- To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
    - Prioritizing Women's leadership as the central theme at an organization will lead to more women in leadership roles
    - Having a women peer network acts as a strong support for women leaders
    - Access to sponsors and mentors acts as catalyst for women leadership
    - Capacity building and upskilling programs play a vital role in enhancing women's leadership journeys
- If a capacity building intervention is launched to support mid-career women in the social sector with one's leadership journey, what key components would you like to see?
- What are some of the skill-building sessions that you think will enable your leadership journey? (Please select all that apply).
- Are there any other skilling or capacity building elements that you would find useful to enhance?
- Are there any other ecosystem support structure(s) that you would find useful?
- Do you currently have access to a community of women leaders in the social sector?
    - If Yes, Please describe
- What mode of program delivery do you think would work the best for such a program?
- Anything else that you want us to remember as we explore creating a capacity building intervention for Emerging Women Leaders?

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About
India Leaders for Social Sector

India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) was set up in September 2018 as a learning and leadership development organization that would help build leadership capacity for India's social sector. Since then, ILSS has launched an array of learning programs: the ILSS Leadership Program – our flagship effort for corporate talent looking to transition to the social sector, the ILSS Fundraising Program – designed to upgrade the fundraising acumen of SPO leaders and professionals, the ILSS Board Program – equipping senior corporate talent to lend their skills to India's social sector by joining SPO Boards and the The ILSS People Practices Program- our newest offering to SPOs, aiming to impart the right knowledge, skills, and dispositions to social sector leaders, to help them attract, engage, develop and retain the right talent at various levels of the organization as they serve their missions for change.

The ILSS Women's Leadership Program is our newest offering for Emerging women leaders in the social sector, informed by the research outlined in this report. We foresee this program as a unique opportunity for women leaders to come together and share their leadership experiences, challenges and decide collective ways ahead, that has direct relevance for their growth to the top of the leadership funnel.

Acknowledgments

NOTES

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