

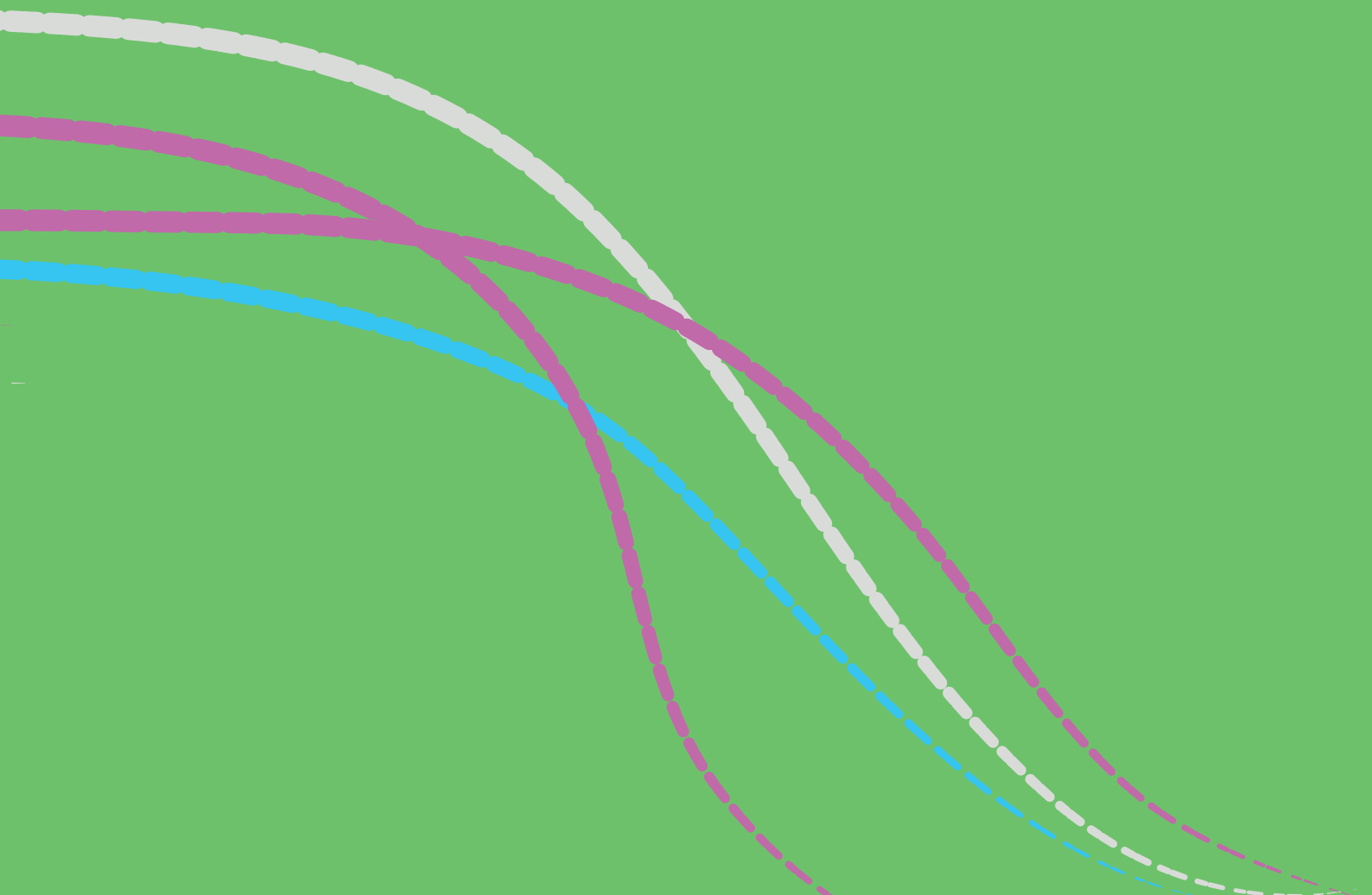
Opportunities for a More Inclusive Indian Foreign Policy

Edition 2 | September 2023

still

India is [^] on the cusp of
being a critical ally to
widen the global
Feminist Foreign Policy
conversation and make it
truly inclusive.

Are we ready?





Applying a Gender Mainstreaming Lens to our Foreign Policy Future

Preface

In April 2022, after a year and a half of research and extensive consultations, the first edition of this report was released by the then Ambassador of Sweden to India and subsequently presented to a larger audience at a side event of the Raisina Dialogue. Simultaneously, we saw the idea of pushing for a greater gender lens in a more concerted manner grow across sectors both in India and globally. We also saw India begin and successfully conduct a G20 presidency with a focus on women-led development, where numerous engagement groups incorporated the importance of gender mainstreaming into the debate. At the Voice of the Global South Summit, India brought together perspectives of developing countries and emerging economies that are not often given

space at the high table, perspectives that it has promised to carry forward. This speaks to the very core of inclusivity that we advocate for in this report. This edition is an updated version of what was released in 2022 with the idea that while many of the themes, challenges and solutions have not drastically changed, some of the data has – data that shows progress along with new policies and frameworks; data that indicates change towards a more inclusive future. Since the release of our first report, more countries have either announced a feminist foreign policy or an intention towards one; a small but growing group. We still believe that India is at the cusp of true transformation and has the power and ability to influence the global feminist foreign policy conversation to make it truly inclusive.

Why Now

New and emerging challenges, from the uncertainties caused by climate change to the cascading effects of the ongoing pandemic, to war in Ukraine, call for alterations in traditional approaches to decision making. Voices need to be heard from diverse skill sets,

backgrounds, expertise and lived experiences. A more inclusive foreign policy lens recognises the emerging threats to a nation and global relationships with an approach that is both progressive and realistic. A status quo or business as usual attitude towards hyper

security and building global coalitions will no longer suffice. We collectively need to reimagine global governance systems and their future, both for an interconnected world and for our national and local futures.

Data and studies indicate that policies, both at the domestic and international levels, which consider gender, have greater impact, and that societies where women are treated more equal to their male counterparts tend to perform better and are more secure.¹ The feminist foreign policy and similar gender mainstreaming approaches that are being implemented in countries including France, Canada, Mexico, Spain and Germany, broaden the potential for inclusive policy-making and could provide the perspective required to help us deal with emerging challenges. Our project dating back to 2021, seeks to widen the lens of both gender and the concept of

what is intersectional in the Indian context and offer the global conversation a different perspective that is not rooted just in western experiences. Men, women and people of other genders are not a homogenous group, both within countries and across the world and thus intersectionality and inclusivity must also be about vulnerabilities, equality and equity, history and social constructs. This updated version of our report, originally released in April 2022, endeavours to continue this important conversation.

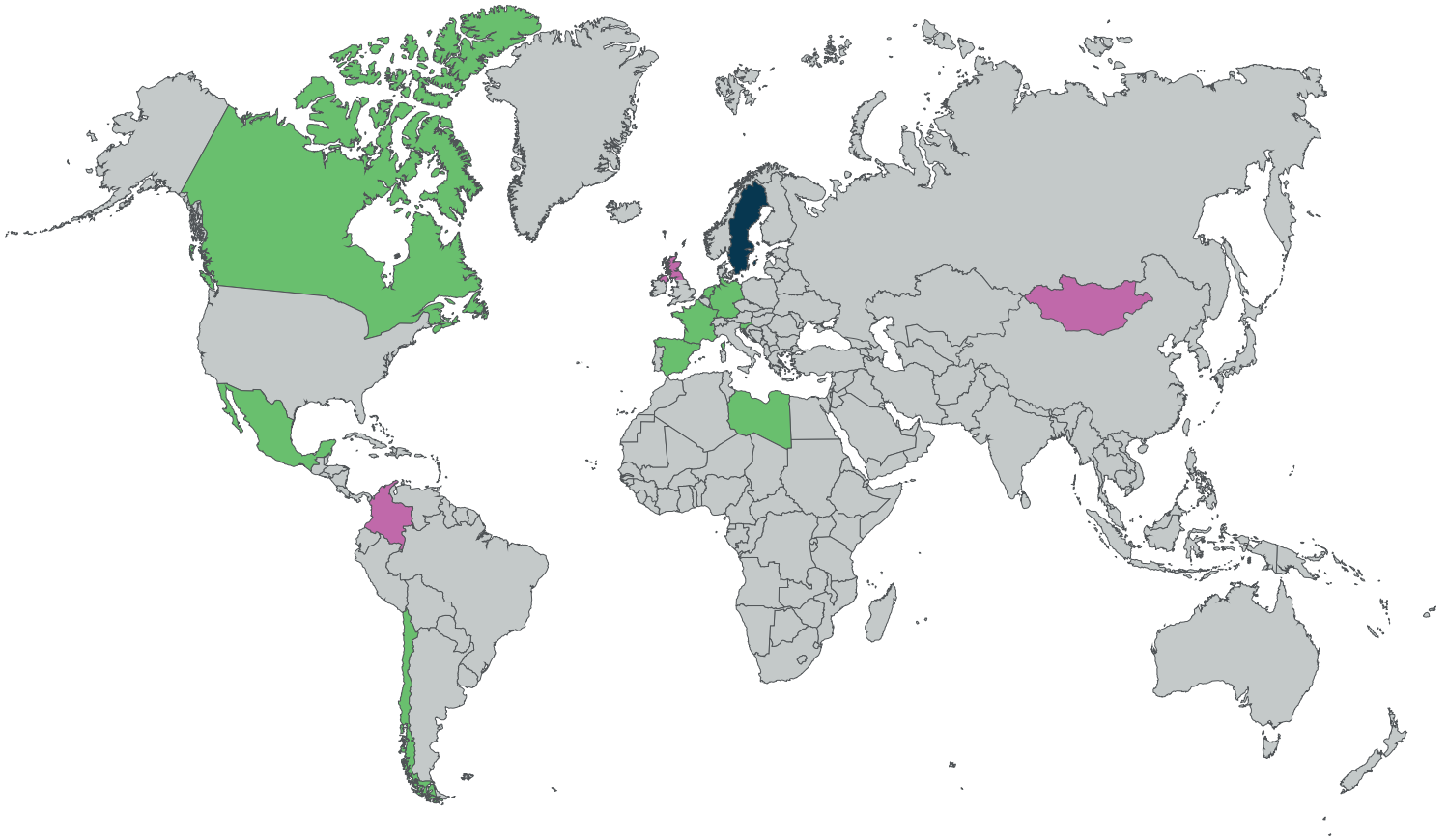
By proactively advocating for more inclusive policies that address concerns about gender based discrimination, we signal a strong commitment to larger global peace efforts. This also ensures that India is recognised as a strategic geopolitical ally that is committed to effectively shape the contours of the changing global governance and a new rules-based order.

"The Feminist Foreign Policy is one step in the right direction, there is a whole process of cultural change that must come with it"

**– H.E. Federico Salas,
Ambassador of Mexico to India**

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Feminist Foreign Policy Globally



	<p>Countries that have a Feminist Foreign Policy in place: Canada (2017)*, France** (2018), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2021), Libya*** (2021), The Netherlands (2022), Chile (2023), Slovenia (2023)</p>
	<p>Countries that have announced the intent to adopt/announced a Feminist Foreign Policy: Colombia (2022), Scotland (2022), Mongolia (2023)</p>
	<p>Countries that reversed their stance on Feminist Foreign Policy: Sweden (adopted in 2014, reversed in 2022)</p>

*Canada began with a 'Feminist International Assistance Plan' in 2017

** France has a 'Feminist Diplomacy' approach in place since 2018

*** Libya has not made a formal policy announcement yet



Why India

The idea of a feminist foreign policy, as pioneered by Sweden in 2014, is based on the premise of feminism as the pursuit of gender equality. Drawing on UN resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), the Swedish model is straightforward. It concentrates on rights, representation and resources when dealing with gender equality; arguing for more women in all aspects of foreign policy-making, to ensure that all forms of decision making include the perspective of women and girls. Change is considered on two fronts – one being the inclusion of more women and their voices at higher levels of decision making, and the other being the application of a gender/inclusive lens to policy decisions, with the aim to achieve better, more sustainable outcomes for our combined geopolitical futures. The imperative here is to go beyond what is traditionally considered ‘gender’ or ‘women’s’ issues and realise that all policies need a gender lens to be lasting. While the government of Sweden in 2022 revoked its feminist foreign policy, gender considerations are still deeply embedded across policymaking and overall the gender related projects and programmes will continue.

Our approach for India, reinforced through numerous consultations and conversations, in both the lead up to the original report and subsequently through 2022 and 2023, is that diversity and inclusion need to go beyond the single focus on women and girls. Equity in policy-making and equality at the discussion table require a broader lens, especially in the context of a diverse multi-ethnic pluralistic

society. We need to go beyond the binary concept of gender, to ensure that all sections of society are represented when policies are formed, especially those that are likely to be most affected by the very policies. While such considerations exist in a domestic context, we argue that this is required in a foreign policy context as well. To achieve that larger goal, we advocate for a more inclusive foreign policy-making framework, where issues of human rights are placed at the heart of discussion by using the tools, values and ideology of a feminist foreign policy framework, within an Indian context.

We believe that India is well poised to embark on this path. Our research and consultations indicate that India has made some progress in terms of both, the area of greater representation of women, and in bringing a gender lens to the policy-making space. However, it is also evident that while the numbers might be increasing, the application of a gender or an even larger human rights lens is still nascent, and somewhat ad hoc. Understanding the thinking and approach applied to some of these foreign policy decisions, especially in the areas of development aid and assistance as well as climate and disaster management could ensure that policies are created under a framework that has a gender and inclusion lens by design. While we have already found some evidence of this, we continue to further study and undertake research to fill in existing gaps. Adopting such an approach would not only strengthen our foreign policy goals for the

future but also enable us to contribute to the growing global discussion that is largely rooted in the transatlantic space.

In 2022, India simultaneously assumed the presidency of the UNSC, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the G20. As India begins to exert influence in multilateral groupings, the time is opportune to engage and shape emerging discussions around feminist foreign policy and other gender mainstreaming approaches. By weighing in on the current global discussion, India can offer a unique perspective in shaping existing and defining new frameworks, and by extension the way forward. The mandate of women-led development that was announced as part of the G20 in early 2023, after the release of the

first report, is an important step in advocating for an expansion of existing frameworks. Through our research we have sought to consolidate past and current perspectives to better understand the extent of gender mainstreaming within India's foreign policy-making space, lending to what could be the Indian perspective. Through this updated paper, we outline a few areas where there is opportunity for greater and more structured gender mainstreaming in India's foreign policy.

While more research and understanding is required, we see great potential and opportunity in the current establishment and policy-making space, where a well-designed inclusive framework is the way forward.

The 2022 report was the outcome of an intensive six-month process which included the following activities. The updated 2023 report builds on that process through further research and ideas from Kubernein Initiative's related work that also incorporates a strong inclusivity lens.



Secondary research



Stakeholder mapping & analysis



Conducting interviews and consultations with stakeholders from a wide gamut of the foreign policy ecosystem including academics, intellectuals, practitioners, diplomats, bureaucrats, historians and members of the media



Engaging with and learning from countries that have already embarked on this path including Germany, Mexico, France, and Canada as well as Sweden and other global organisations conducting similar research efforts, in Germany, USA, the European Parliament and Australia

State of Play

In this section we examine and highlight some of the gaps that exist in terms of equal representation. While the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has seen tremendous change within, both in terms of more female entrants and women at senior decision-making positions, a significant gap still exists. Only in 2022 did India appoint its first woman Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations in New York, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj; and in 2023 India appointed

its first woman Charge d’Affaires to head the Indian High Commission in Pakistan, Geetika Srivastava. Based on data available from the MEA website we have highlighted this gap in heads of divisions and heads of missions globally (page 13), which are both key positions of foreign policy-making and implementation. More efforts are needed to bridge these gaps and ensure that a diverse set of voices is represented at all levels of policy-making and power.

Ministry of External Affairs



	Total Divisions	Men	Women
Heads of Divisions*	64	52	8

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* Heads of Division from org chart and correlated with MEA division website, as of August 17, 2023

* Data from MEA website, as of August 17, 2023.

* Discrepancy of 4, because certain ministry officials are heading more than one division.



Challenges

Overcoming Structural Inequality

Organisational structures, in general or in the policy-making space, often operate within a set of rules, where power, responsibility, authority and accountability are consciously planned. Both men and women experience this, but differently, thereby giving rise to inequality within the work space. Despite changes in laws and gender sensitisation trainings, gender biases continue to persist within organisations. Even in diplomacy, which is viewed as a gender neutral subject, neutrality and equality are two different things: that the foreign services are 'open for all' is different from being equitable. Women are 'accommodated' rather than treated as an integral part of the institution contributing equally to its success. As a result, over the years, women diplomats have had increased representation but are 'kept busy' in softer conversations such as consular affairs sections or with people-to-people and development issues, though there is now a perceptible shift in diplomatic postings and division heads.

Inherent gender biases lead to questioning of women's ability to function in challenging

spaces. Strategic and defence portfolios are seldom allocated to women. Women often lack access to professional experience, financial backing, networking, growth opportunities and mentoring that their male counterparts often have access to, perpetuating a cycle. Gendered expectations within organisations mostly place the heavier burden on the woman as a parent to be the primary care giver, often leading to a break in service. Gendered issues within the workspace such as maternity leave, lack of mobility, inability to take up non-family postings due to dual responsibilities of family and work, lack of support from spouses who do not relocate when women officers are posted out, are all treated as 'women's problems' thereby placing the burden of addressing and resolving them squarely on women. This 'othering' of the issue reinforces inequality within the system as women officers are 'too busy' trying to resolve these 'women's issues' and report on what they have done for their fellow women officers, instead of concentrating on furthering their careers and advancing overall goals of policy and diplomacy.

‘Thoughts and Ideas on Gender Mainstreaming and Foreign Policy in India’

A snapshot of the most commonly occurring words and phrases during discussions and roundtables



Breaking Binary Barriers

Traditional portfolios in foreign policy such as military, security, arms, trade, and power seldom see active participation and decision-making by women.³ This is largely due to the patriarchal construct that supports the idea that these fields are traditionally a male domain and therefore unsafe for women and/or also out of the purview of their understanding and experiences. This gender binary, reinforced from an early age, promotes the idea that men and women have inherently different and opposite skills. Gendered issues are typically held in such binaries: soft power versus hard power, masculine versus feminine, security issues versus non-traditional security issues, domestic versus foreign, where everything powerful is masculine and everything marginalised is feminine. While explicit biases have been addressed to some extent and we

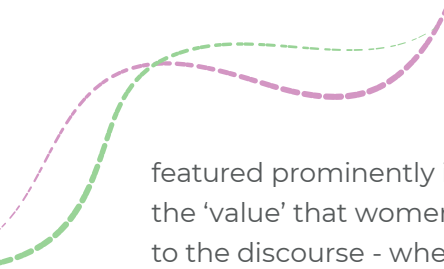
have made significant strides, sub-conscious biases still exist not only in our organisational systems, but also in foreign engagements.

For policies to be inclusive, especially foreign policy, experiences of diverse communities who are impacted by the policy must be considered. In every consultation, we have heard that the term 'intersectional' must be used to define a feminist foreign policy; as when we talk of gender we are also talking of vulnerabilities, inclusivity, and equity, ideas that were reinforced during various G20 meetings and will ideally be taken forward by successive presidencies. As newer and various dimensions of diversity and inclusion come to the forefront, there is minimal focus, for example, on the inclusion of gender neutral language within current policies and governance.

Moving from Representation to Meaningful Participation

India has come a long way in terms of the evolution of the role and place of women in the foreign services since the case of C.B. Muthumma, the first woman to clear the civil service examination. She went to court in 1979⁴ to protest the denial of a promotion on account of her gender. In the early stages of India's foreign services, several rules⁵ reflected a stereotypical view on the abilities of married women, linking performance to the traditional understanding of a woman's domestic commitments, and even treating a male spouse of a serving officer very differently from a female spouse (with the former having access to greater privileges). Today, there are more women in the foreign services than ever before. As of August 2023,

women constitute 13.11 percent of senior leadership positions within the MEA, and 24 women serve as heads of Indian Missions in other countries, many in countries of strategic importance to India. However, women officers at the Under Secretary level are 28.57 percent, nearly twice the percentage of women at senior leadership positions. While we are closer to parity at a middle level, the MEA must create inclusive policies to retain these women as they transition to senior roles. The latest available figure, before going to print in September of 2023 for the total number of women employees in the MEA (both gazetted and non-gazetted officers) was 676, out of a total of 4888 employees, or about 13.82percent.⁶ The question that



featured prominently in our discussions was the 'value' that women's participation adds to the discourse - whether having women in positions of power brings any considerable change to the way that decision making takes place; and subsequently if women are able to alter the agenda to reimagine 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of security policy. Do women also advance the cause of women's empowerment at the highest echelons of power? Perhaps

it is time to move beyond asking these questions, which continue to place the onus of responsibility on a woman's ability, when very often, similar questions are not asked to their male counterparts. Through this research process, it has also become clear that a fundamental re-imagining of what constitutes 'hard' and 'soft' power is needed and accordingly, diplomacy must be conducted based on these changing realities.

"I believe that women-led development will be a significant driver of change in the 21st century."

**– Prime Minister Narendra Modi,
at the G20 Summit Session 2**

September 09, 2023

Source: MEA Media Centre

Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and Heads of Mission



Status as of August 2023

Missions Abroad	203, in 149 countries and at multilateral organisations
Total Men	163
Total Women	24

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Missions and Consulates headed by women: Angola | Armenia | Brazil | Cambodia | Canada | China | Cyprus | Denmark | Germany | Indonesia | Italy | Kazakhstan | Kenya | Malta | Mauritius | Netherlands | Pakistan | Poland | Slovak Republic | Slovenia | United States of America | UN-PMI(New York)

* 'Missions abroad' include Embassies, High Commissions, Consulate Generals, Acting Heads (where applicable) and Permanent Representation at Multilateral Forums as of August 2023. Data sourced from MEA website, (<https://www.mea.gov.in/indian-mission-abroad.htm>) and cross-referenced with relevant Embassy websites; and from a Lok Sabha Secretariat report prepared by the Parliament's Committee on External Affairs.

* Total Missions Abroad- 203 (Some discrepancies are because 11 missions are vacant, or, shut/in transition and some Honorary Consulates are headed by the same Foreign Service Officers serving as Ambassadors and Honorary Consuls in other countries). Vacant missions (those without an Ambassador or High Commissioner) are: Burkina Faso, Congo [Republic of], Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Lithuania, Mali, Mauritania [Islamic Republic of], Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Yemen.

Note: This list excludes Pakistan as India will have a new Chargé D'Affaires in Islamabad.

Feminist Vs Gender

There is great reservation around the use of the term 'feminist' while proposing a more inclusive foreign policy approach. This is not unique to India. Germany for instance, until December 2021, did not use the word 'feminist' in the framing of its foreign policy. From Germany we have heard that the word reminded society of the feminist struggles of the 1970s and was therefore met with reluctance. The preferred term was 'gender justice' or 'gender equality'. Through 2020-2021, the Federal Foreign Office implemented several programmes that spoke to the values of justice and equality where the new coalition government has now broadened that approach to a feminist foreign policy as a whole. From Canada we have also heard of some backlash faced for the use of the word 'feminist', while Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy is imagined as affirmative action for women.

In India, the use of the word 'feminist' has also raised its fair share of concerns. It is often associated with disruptive activism where both men and women feel that women will hijack and alter the agenda in a way that men will lose out on power, authority and influence, and that control will lie only in the hands of a small minority of privileged women, which could present a new set of issues. In our consultations, both men and women suggest the use of a more neutral term for a gender mainstreaming approach, one that treats all genders equally and fairly and takes an intersectional approach that is

more reflective of the country. Even though India has a rich feminist history, the use of the term 'feminist foreign policy' is viewed as a western concept that undermines the work undertaken to eliminate intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation based on caste, class, age, religion, disability etc. While there is an assumption that the push to adopt this approach is external, it is evident from our conversations that external advocates and practitioners of feminist and gender inclusive policies have no such prescriptive intentions and strongly propose that countries develop and adopt their own context specific feminist policies.

Language plays a critical role and is an area that must be discussed and debated before we come to the understanding of what terminology suits the Indian context best. Not just the use of the term 'feminist' or 'gender mainstreaming' but also clearly defining the terms is crucial in laying down the foundational ideology of a gender equal, non-binary foreign policy that seeks to correct historical imbalances of power. The language used in Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy for instance reflects its gender-balanced agenda and is inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly for India, through wider consultations, we must arrive at the terminology and language that would help further the impact of gender equality and develop a framework to add to the global basket of options for others to consider.



Opportunities for the Way Forward

Systemic Reform	A key element in addressing hurdles of inherently traditional organisation structures and ensuring that an inclusive approach is a standalone forward looking strategic concern.
Bridging the Gap	By understanding that an inclusive foreign policy can co-exist with domestic efforts on gender inclusion, there are not only multiple benefits to reap at home but also, an important perspective is offered to the global conversation.
Invested Leadership	A central component of any strategic change in foreign policy approach; we believe that India is already on this path, where a serious investment from the leadership is the push required.



Working Towards Systemic Reforms

Addressing hurdles of inherently traditional organisational structures require systemic reforms where solutions are institutionalised to empower future generations. Our societies are structured through hierarchy, an ordering principle that is about gender, but also about various forms of social and economic divides. These systems are reflected in national and global politics, where the domestic considerations and realities either through people themselves or institutions affect decision making at the international level. Thus, it is time to work towards creating systemic change and reform where an intersectional and inclusive approach to foreign policy is not in bits and pieces but is the norm. Where the concepts of a feminist foreign policy applied in India rest with the office and not the person. Representation and greater participation, greater investment through intellectual and human resources, along with finances and a shift in narrative, are key elements of working towards this change.

There is no doubt that India is already on the path of greater representation. Added to this is the core element of training and capacity building at all levels of leadership, and for all genders. This not only works in making organisations more sensitive, but it also leads to an increased awareness of internalised gender biases that manifest themselves in the workplace, both domestically and internationally. The Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service conducts relevant training for entry and mid-career level diplomats and members of the foreign service. What is also needed is capacity building and knowledge of the core concepts of a more inclusive foreign policy, where bureaucrats and decision makers have the ability to implement that understanding in larger policy decisions.

Added to this is the key element of data and the need to understand the gendered impact

of policies. Systemic changes will then enable dynamic decision-making environments where women's advancement does not depend on their ability to sound like their male peers, or male members do not feel marginalised due to their socio-economic background or other factors. Where younger individuals can ask hard questions without the risk of being sidelined. Where positive notions of masculinity⁷ are promoted that address in a proactive manner, some of the issues relating to the patriarchal power structures between men and women.

As we have learnt, language and a shift in the narrative also play a key role in effective systemic changes. This includes a fundamental redefining of the traditional notions of hard and soft power. The nature and understanding of security issues around the world have widened in scope to include multi-dimensional considerations such as natural disasters, climate, health and resources, the economy, technology, development, and cooperation. There is no such thing anymore as a 'soft' issue, all of these affect the security of people and nations and need a diversity of voices. Moving away from old notions of hard and soft, or development and women's issues in rhetoric, understanding and policy is at the core of global discussions on gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. Our push to include more voices and perspectives from countries in the Global South in various forums also signals a shift away from global systems that need change. Universal topics such as climate change, technology, and global governance systems are slowly being considered at the core of India's security agenda, especially with greater focus having been placed on the G20 agenda. Beyond what the country has already achieved, we argue that gender mainstreaming or an inclusive approach needs to be a standalone strategic concern and not simply a paragraph in a larger agreement.


Informed and Invested Leadership

As decision making in India is traditionally top down, an informed and invested leadership will be central to the introduction of any form of gender inclusive foreign policy. We are already on the path towards this, sometimes seemingly more by default than by design. A recent statement by Dr. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister, where he mentions that “we need to look at three things here: Getting more women to engage with foreign policy issues, reflect women’s interests in foreign policy, and bring in a feminist perspective to foreign policy”⁸, coupled with our research indicates a serious potential for India to create a framework that is inclusive, robust and lasting.

Our leaders need to understand where our strengths lie and how we can use those strengths towards promoting a wider inclusive policy-making space for the country. These could be areas of trade, climate change, health, digital inclusion or development aid, where India has already made strides. Some of this understanding and drive already exists. For example, India has taken a key interest in leading climate change and disaster management initiatives in the region as well as globally. It established the International Solar Alliance (ISA) along with France in 2015, where the business models developed by ISA, took into consideration gender equity, especially for the solar pumping programme. 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.”

India also has a history of contributing to peacekeeping forces. In January 2023, India deployed a platoon of women peacekeepers as part of the Indian Battalion in the United Nations Interim Security Force, Abyei (UNISFA), between Sudan and South Sudan. Since the first-ever all women’s contingent was deployed in Liberia in 2007, this is the largest single unit of women peacekeepers in a UN Mission.⁹

The formulation of foreign policy in India is predominantly a function of the legislature and executive and has limited interface with civil society. It is thus critical for the intellectual community, feminist organisations, and development organisations that are connected to the foreign policy ecosystem to research further and develop pathways to mainstream gender equality. This will also aid in identifying and addressing gaps beyond the numerous initiatives that India has. Our all-women Peacekeeping forces in the past have been much lauded; is there a way then to understand the reason and cascading effects of their success and bring that understanding into other relevant areas of policy-making? India’s development cooperation engagements increasingly include activities that promote inclusivity and gender mainstreaming. This can be seen through the ITEC (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) programme of the Ministry of External Affairs, that are targeted programmes with partner countries and others.¹⁰ In 2022-2023, the ITEC budget comprised 35.38 percent of the MEA’s total budget, a slight decrease from the previous year, though the quality of development partnership has not diminished.¹¹ Do these funds include a gender lens? Are there necessary targets and indicators to ensure that gender is a principle and not just a significant focus of the programme? These are further questions that



need to be carefully considered. Our research indicates that many successes exist within the initiatives spearheaded by India. However,

a more detailed study of both successes and gaps could be the necessary building block to creating a larger framework.

Bridging the Gaps between Foreign Policy and Domestic Reality

Some scepticism towards a gender inclusive foreign policy stems from the fact that much remains to be done domestically, where India had slipped to the 140th position on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index 2021, but is now in the 127th position.¹² However, a gender inclusive foreign policy can co-exist with domestic efforts on gender inclusion. A country's foreign policy is designed to deal with issues that affect its relations with its neighbours, allies, and other state entities. While originally intended to protect national sovereignty and interest, the purview of foreign policy has expanded in the recent past to include engaging with like-minded nations on issues that affect global and subsequently local futures. This shift in perspective opens up the possibility for gender to be a strategic consideration, by design and not by default, within the various aspects of foreign policy. Countries such as Mexico, that have adopted such policies, are using the larger external framework to drive change at home as well.

Let us take the example of trade policies. One of the economic consequences of the pandemic is the disproportionate exclusion of women from the workforce. Women in India were 7 times more likely to lose work during lockdowns, and 11 times more likely to not return to work after nationwide lockdowns were lifted.¹³ Research shows that more women in the labour force lead to economic gains: a boost to growth, higher productivity,

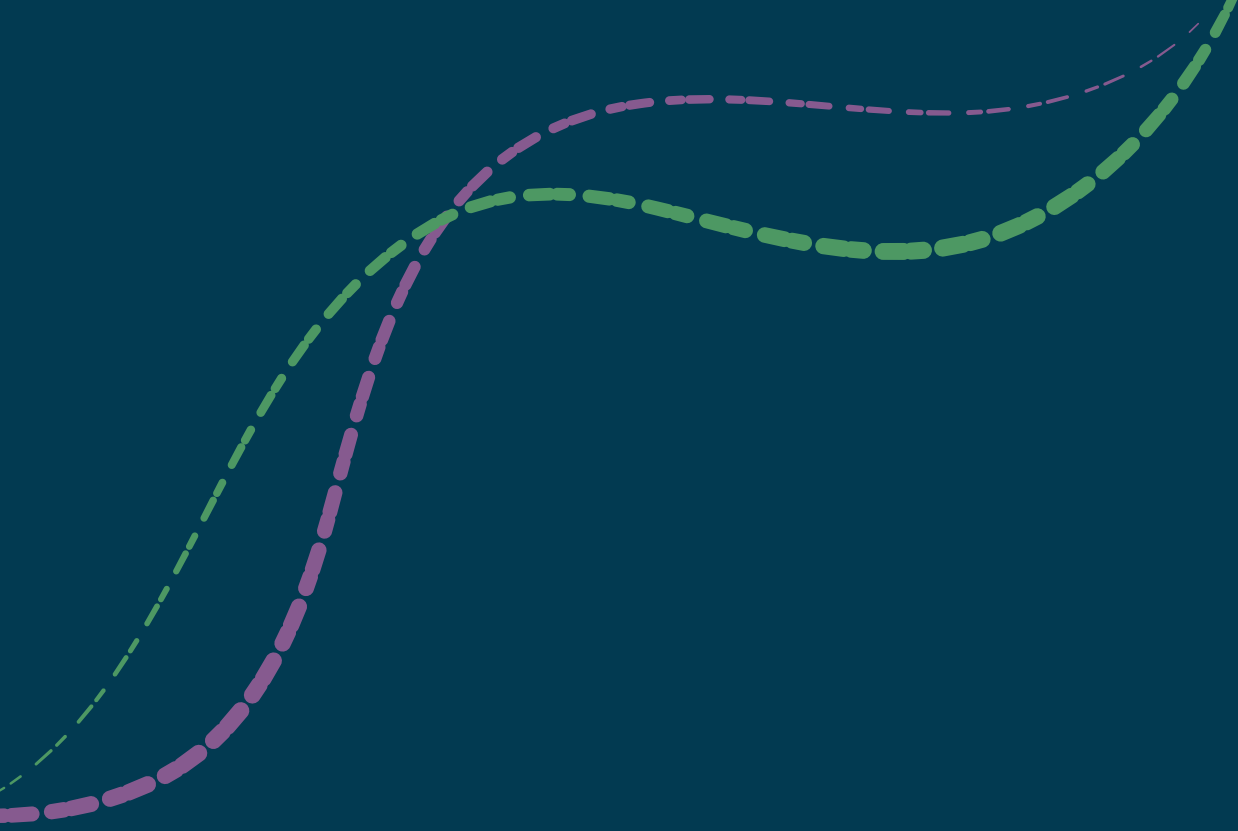
progress, and an all-round benefit to society.¹⁴ Conversely, it is estimated that gender gaps cost the economy around 15 percent of GDP.¹⁵ Having in place the principles of a Feminist Trade Policy, such as seen in Canada, would both recognise the positive impact that women have on the economy and promote gender equality through trade at home. The importance of having a gender component in trade policy is already recognised to some extent, especially in regional trade groupings such as BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal).¹⁶ India is actively trying to maximise the potential of its blue and green economy, but it cannot overlook the fact that women are the backbone of these industries. Along with having women at the negotiating table and in policy formulation, gender mainstreaming in trade policy could also involve interfacing with industry groups as well as business promotion groups that recognise some issues faced by women entrepreneurs and women business owners and provide mechanisms to make the business environment more gender inclusive. A starting point to consider is the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which lists 'Women's Economic Empowerment' as a focus area.¹⁷ A more concerted effort to implement a focused gender understanding within a policy, and its implementation thereof, has multiple positive benefits, including health, climate, education amongst others, both as a foreign policy goal and in a domestic context.



Conclusion

Since the first edition of this report, the needle has moved for India, with the government shifting the narrative from “women’s development” to “women led development”. While we acknowledge that India might not be ready to announce any form of gender inclusive foreign policy, however, given existing gender considerations in our foreign policy, and a more intentional move to use the term “inclusive” in public outreach, there are markers that prove we may not be very far behind. Some areas where we see progress towards achieving gender equality (though we acknowledge that the process has been sometimes disconnected, and often reactive to global events or partner countries’ initiatives) include some of our climate policies, multilateral and regional conversations and institutions, and health diplomacy amongst others. It is our belief that the intent and values behind many of these ideas and initiatives, coupled with increased participation that is meaningful, have the ability to shape our future foreign policy efforts. India’s 2023 G20 Presidency has showcased our resolve and ability to offer alternative perspectives to the growing global discussion, as has our push for more concentrated diplomacy and engagement with other emerging economies and global south engagement.

The global pandemic, increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, and fragility of an increasingly multipolar world order, have underscored the need for greater cooperation, especially highlighting the undeniable need for greater participation of women in all areas of decision making. Several countries have taken this path, realising that this not only strengthens global democratic institutions but can have positive effects domestically. In September 2023, the Indian Parliament passed the historic Women’s Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. This is a welcome move that will pave way for greater gender mainstreaming and representation, and must be coupled with sustained political will. There remains a gap between any stated focus and overall principles in a framework and the potential for implementation between foreign and domestic realities. Countries, institutions, civil society and people are attempting to bridge these gaps and create a more meaningful system that is truly inclusive in all aspects. Many more countries are bringing a strong gender agenda and framework to various global discussions. While there is no doubt India weighs in on the conversation bringing unique ideas and experiences, it is time we begin leading the conversation.



“We must continue to push the frontiers of gender equality and women’s empowerment in every area - political, social, and cultural - nationally, in order to carry weight internationally as a gender equality champion.”

– Ambassador Lakshmi Puri²

Acknowledgements

For any information regarding the research of the first report please refer to the link on our website. It provides more detail on our methodology and consultation process:

<https://kuberneininitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Opportunities-for-a-more-Inclusive-Indian-Foreign-Policy.pdf>.

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About 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. Kubernein Initiative is co-founded by Ambika Vishwanath and Priyanka Bhide, who bring their combined skills of research, analysis and strategic communications to successfully execute projects relating to security, governance, sustainability and development.

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About Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom, and justice through political education. KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties, and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. Together with their partners, they make a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible manner. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas:

- Foreign and Security Policy
- Economic, Climate and Energy Policy

- Rule of Law
- Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change
- Media and Youth

The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions who implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

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End Notes and References

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- ⁴Full text of the ruling in favour of C.B. Muthamma can be accessed here: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1339558/>
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- ¹⁰The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program promotes and implements numerous programmes including vocational training in areas like textiles and garments, computers, enterprise development, rainwater harvesting etc. From 2015 to 2017, USAID partnered with the Governments of India and Afghanistan to support the Self-Employed Women’s Association’s (SEWA), an Indian women’s cooperative, to implement the Afghan Women’s Empowerment Program.
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