



## **"Empowering Women in 2030: Expert's Vision for Inclusive Progress and Global Impact"**

**Dr Archana Singh,  
Gender Policy Specialist,  
Consultant Child Protection, UNICEF**

### **Dr Archana Singh's Blueprint for Bridging Socio-Economic Gaps and Fostering Women-Led Development**

**Intro:** This week on Socio-economic Voices, step into the future with **Dr. Archana Singh, Public Policy, Diversity & Inclusion & Development Professional and Consultant, UN Women**. And let's unveil the true essence of empowerment while India strides ahead towards new goals of transformative change. In this exclusive interview, at Indiastat with senior Journalist **Mahima Sharma**, Dr Singh unveils her vision and insight on policy shifts, technological advancements, and collaborative strategies that promise a more inclusive and equitable tomorrow. Join us as we explore the roadmap towards gender equality, financial independence, and sustainable socio-economic development.

**MS: How do you envision the women of 2030 in terms of financial independence, and what kind of policy changes would be required to realize your vision? In what ways can we leverage technology to address socio-economic disparities between genders?**

**Dr Archana:** The Gandhinagar G20 commitment 2023 envisions 30X30, which means 30% women in the workforce by 2030. This is a step towards financial independence and aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth). During India's G20 Presidency, G20 EMPOWER (which is an alliance between the private sector and the Government) focussed on 'women-led development' marking a shift from women's empowerment alone. Significant steps (for both rural and urban women) have been taken to ensure that women are economically empowered. This includes a TechEquity, a Digital Inclusion platform developed and launched at the G20 EMPOWER Summit under India's G20 Presidency that would be of value and use for women around the world (including India) in education and subsequently as an enabler for transition and progression in careers, particularly in STEM. The platform has been designed (by India) to enable women (from across the world) to educate and upskill themselves on digital literacy, financial literacy and technical areas through training programs and resources provided on the platform. These courses will be available in 120 international and Indian languages and are envisaged to reach 1 million users (in the next 1 year).

India's G20 presidency has also given a voice to women at the grassroots by successfully focusing on India's SHG revolution wherein 80 million women in 8 million Self Help Groups manage 34 billion dollars of monetary value. For the first time, the KPI Dashboard (which is an outcome of the proceeding G20 Presidency) looks at the role of women in Small and Medium Enterprises.

**MS: What steps are required to bridge the urban and rural divide among women when it comes to India as well as other developing nations?**

Dr Archana: India is working on a bottom up approach, addressing the urban-rural divide among women through a holistic strategy. The magnanimity of scale in a democracy like ours makes it complex and challenging. Recent national level interventions like the introduction of the <sup>1</sup>'Guide on Gender-Inclusive Communication', <sup>2</sup>Gender Responsive Budgeting' <sup>3</sup>Gender Inclusion Fund' (NEP 2020), <sup>4</sup>'Gender Disaggregated Data Reporting' are key interventions for equity and equality. India adopts a 'A life cycle continuum approach' from Healthcare schemes (POSHAN 2.0, Saksham Aanganwadi, Aayushman Bharat, eSanjeevani etc.), Education (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mission Shakti etc. ), Skill Development (PMKVY, NAPS etc. ) Digital Literacy (PMGDISHA etc.) to Financial Literacy (PM Jan Dhan Yojana etc.) to prioritise the inclusion and empowerment of women.

**MS: As we move towards an increasingly digital and automated workforce, how can policies ensure that women are not left behind in the job market?**

**Dr Archana:** India is actively focussing on the theme on Women and the Future of Work: Bridging Digital and Skilling Gaps for Access to Jobs and Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship. This is concentrated on enhancing women's access to digital skills and infrastructure, prioritizing quality and safety, ensuring a secure and inclusive digital literacy experience, fostering greater participation in the digital ecosystem. It also focusses on incentivizing employers to promote women's participation in non-traditional sectors by addressing structural issues that shape gender roles, thereby encouraging women's entrepreneurship and diversification of career aspirations. Schemes like Vigyan Jyoti , KVPY Niti Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Portal are exemplary, promoting women's participation in STEM fields.

**MS: UNGENDERING life and opportunities vs. Demand for Feminism - which one would you go with and why when it comes to more and equitable socio-economic opportunities for women vs. men? Which one is the need of the hour - why and how?**

**Dr Archana:** Engendering refers to the process of eliminating gender bias and stereotypes, striving for a society where opportunities and roles are not predefined or restricted by gender norms. Feminism, on the other hand, is a socio-political movement advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all genders, particularly emphasizing the empowerment of women and dismantling patriarchal structures. The choice between "ungendering life and opportunities" and the "demand for feminism" is not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement each other. The need of the hour is a holistic approach that integrates both, as gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes embedded in societal structures and norms. While engendering seeks to neutralize gender biases in various aspects of life, feminism is the force that actively challenges systemic inequalities. Together, they create a powerful synergy, accelerating the pace of change.

The demand for feminism is urgent, fuelled by the stark reality that the <sup>5</sup>World Economic Forum predicts it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap. This staggering timeline is an unequivocal call to action. We cannot afford to wait, as each passing year perpetuates injustice and stifles the potential of countless individuals. My emotional plea to everyone is one of impatience and frustration at the persistence of inequality. It's a plea for solidarity, urging individuals, irrespective of gender, to become advocates and protagonists of change. Imagine a world where opportunities are not constrained by gender, where dreams are not shattered by societal expectations. The urgency lies in our collective power to dismantle the barriers that hinder progress, making way for a future where equality is not just an aspiration but a lived reality for all. Picture a world where your gender doesn't slam doors on your dreams. It's time to break down those barriers together and make equality a real deal for everyone—no waiting around!

**MS: South Asia faces unique socio-economic challenges. How can regional collaborations led by India address these challenges and create opportunities for women's advancement and self-empowerment?**

**Dr Archana:** India has emerged as the voice of the Global South. The Global South is not just a diplomatic term but represents the shared history of these countries against colonialism and apartheid based on which modern relations are being reshaped. So how has India walked the talk, when it comes to women's empowerment in the Global South? For the first time in the history of G20, there has been unanimous consensus on hard hitting aspects related to gender (sexual harassment, gender based violence etc.) in the G20 Leaders Declaration 2023. It compels countries to curate their action plans and report on progress in these matters.

**MS: Women having children with disabilities: What kind of new policies are needed to ensure financial and mental upliftment of the same?**

**Dr Archana:** To support women with children with disabilities, a multifaceted policy approach is needed. For rural communities, leveraging networks like Anganwadi Centers is vital. The government's recent initiatives in tracking and assisting children with disabilities through these centers is a step forward. Expanding micro-credit facilities and financial aid programs can also empower these mothers financially.

In urban areas, policies enabling flexible work arrangements and accessible childcare facilities are essential. Collaborating with NGOs, community health workers, and the private sector, especially in healthcare and education, can amplify the effectiveness of these policies.

**MS: India faces the challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. How can socio-economic policies be crafted to ensure growth without compromising the well-being of women and the environment?**

**Dr Archana:** Key strategies include promoting sustainable agriculture and resource management, recognizing women's significant role in these sectors. For instance, initiatives like the Green Development Pact, First Responders Framework on Climate Change and Disaster (led by women) emphasize environmental sustainability while ensuring women's active participation and leadership. Additionally, gender-sensitive approaches in climate action and resource management are vital. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration 2023, advocates gender-inclusive climate action.

**MS: Burgeoning population of India, maternity burden, as well as inflation are scaling up. What kind of law or stringent measure is required to control this alarming situation?**

**Dr Archana:** India's short-term economic growth will stand on the shoulders of its 678.6 million strong labour force, as estimated by S&P Global Market Intelligence. India, home to 1.4 billion people, has surpassed mainland China to become the world's most populous country, according to UN estimates. We have a demographic dividend! This gives India potential advantages, especially at a time when countries around the world are facing declining birth rates and tight labour markets. S&P Global Market Intelligence forecasts that India's population will continue growing over the coming decade. The UN estimates that India's population will not begin to decline for another four decades. McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) estimates that India could boost its GDP by USD 0.7 trillion by bringing 68 million more women into India's workforce by 2025.

**MS: With laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace existing in many countries, there remains a gap in compliance with international standards and effective enforcement. What is your vision for the future of women's safety, security, and mental well-being, and what role should women themselves play in this change?**

**Dr Archana:** While legislative frameworks addressing domestic violence and workplace harassment exist, it is imperative to acknowledge their inadequacies on a global scale. It's like having a fence that looks sturdy but can't stop a determined burglar. It is crucial to recognize that laws, in isolation, prove insufficient. The necessity lies in addressing the underlying root cause, which is the need for a transformation in societal mindsets.

We have to tackle the root cause. It is the mindsets of people/perpetrators that needs to change first! We need to focus on the upbringing of our children/our future generations, to ensure that they condemn any kind of violence and injustice. We need a shift in thinking, a total overhaul. It is opportune to discard antiquated mentalities and strive towards constructing a future where women not only endure but truly flourish.

<sup>1</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1980639>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1811397>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/PIB1944287.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/PIB1944287.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1975907>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cNBC.com/2023/06/21/wef-global-gender-gap-could-take-131-years-to-close.html>

## About Dr Archana Singh

*Sr Archana is **Gender Policy Specialist and Consultant Child Protection, UNICEF** A seasoned development professional with 20+ years' experience, has left an indelible mark in key organizations including NSDC, SCPwD, CII, Learning Links Foundation, and Fortis Memorial Research Institute. With a fervent commitment to Gender Equality and Social Impact, she influences policy in Education, Healthcare, Skills, and the 'Climate Change' sector. Notable achievements include shaping PLI & FAME II policies at Central and State levels for Cycles/E cycles, revising EV policies in Delhi, Chandigarh, Punjab, HP, and Telangana. Dr. Singh spearheaded PMKVY, impacting 10 million youth, and initiated Skill Saathi, a national career counseling scheme with a Rs.46 CR outreach. As a founding member of SCPwD, she has played a crucial role in developing national standards for Persons with Disabilities. Internationally, she has represented and partnered under UNWomen, UKIERI, Scottish Government, and Glasgow, showcasing her global impact in the development sector.*

## About the Interviewer

*Mahima Sharma is an Independent Journalist based in Delhi NCR. She has been in the field of TV, Print & Online Journalism since 2005 and previously an additional three years in allied media. In her span of work she has been associated with CNN-News18, ANI - Asian News International (A collaboration with Reuters), Voice of India, Hindustan Times and various other top media brands of their times. In recent times, she has diversified her work as a Digital Media Marketing Consultant & Content Strategist as well. Starting March 2021, she is also a pan-India Entrepreneurship Education Mentor at Women Will - An Entrepreneurship Program by Google in Collaboration with SHEROES. Mahima can be reached at [media@indiastat.com](mailto:media@indiastat.com)*

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