


India and the G20: Moving Towards an Inclusive Agenda

Policy Brief I, 2022

Introduction

Preparations are underway as India officially assumes the G20 presidency on December 1, 2022. As per the G20 mechanism, on December 1, 2021, India already joined the troika of countries that pass on the baton of leadership over a 3-year period. The process is designed to ensure smooth transitions and some continuity in terms of body of work. India's G20 presidency comes at a critical stage in world affairs: amidst an impending

global recession, food and energy crises, a war in Europe and the aftermath of a devastating pandemic. Deep rooted fault lines are emerging, and global inequities can no longer be ignored. Transformative solutions are needed, where voices of the most vulnerable nations and communities are heard in new systems of global governance. India has an important and unique role to play. Against this backdrop, this brief unpacks some of the



varied G20 conversations and brings in an inclusivity perspective to bridging some of these challenges that India will take on as it assumes the G20 mantle of presidency.

The G20 was originally constituted in response to an economic crisis, with the “aim of discussing policies in order to achieve international financial stability”. Over the years however, the scope of issues covered under its purview has expanded considerably. For example, Health Security, which was added as a priority area in 2020 during Saudi Arabia’s G20 presidency, featured extensively in Italy’s W20 summit in 2021, and continues to be a mainstay of Indonesia’s G20 presidency. The Italy-Indonesia-India troika was set up under the broader rubric of ‘Recover Together, Recover Stronger’. Other overarching themes include climate and health security, energy transition, digital transformation, and post-pandemic recovery. There is a pressing need to ensure that through reformed multilateralism, engagements such as a G20, despite being normative in nature, ensure that injustices are effectively addressed.

India’s design for the G20 Secretariat will also enable capacity building (including knowledge and expertise) to support India’s leadership and contribution to global issues in

multilateral fora beyond 2023. In all official and other communications on India’s upcoming G20, including speeches at public events, the importance of ‘equity and inclusion’ has been a prevalent idea. Most countries holding the G20 presidency have engaged on gender related issues, both, through the W20, as well as through certain thematic areas. It will be expected that India too will cover this issue in some capacity, and particularly through the W20, which is an important official G20 engagement group and the EMPOWER track.

Such an expansion in themes is necessary, as economic solutions cannot exist in isolation, and an integrated approach will yield better outcomes. However, it is equally important that the aims and objectives of the ancillary discussions tie in closely with the core G20 goals. Gender becomes a crosscutting issue while considering inclusive and sustainable economic development. We have found strong evidence in India’s external actions where there has already been gender consideration and a gender lens applied to certain policy decisions (as elaborated in our previous report). This goes to show that India is well poised to shape further the global conversation on gender equality and governance and helm the agenda for norm setting that will guide the G20 in the future.

Key Focus Areas -

“inclusive, equitable and sustainable growth; LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment); women’s empowerment; digital public infrastructure and tech-enabled development, skill-mapping, culture and tourism; climate financing; circular economy; global food security; energy security; green hydrogen; disaster risk reduction and resilience; developmental cooperation; fight against economic crime; and multilateral reforms”.⁶



Challenges

Based on our research and analysis, as well as conversations with experts that have been engaged with the process and those from the broader policy ecosystem, we present two key challenges that continue to emerge and a few recommendations for the ways

forward. They are by no means exhaustive. The recommendations are relevant for all the different actors involved, where India's G20 presidency can create more cohesion with a strong equity and inclusivity lens and set a path for change for other countries.

An Expanding Agenda

There is concern that adding new focus areas for the G20's consideration will lead to a dilution of its original agenda - one of economic security and financial cooperation. Over time, several tracks and engagement groups that deal with urban affairs, climate and environmental concerns, youth perspectives and others have been added. Geopolitical tensions also have spillover effects into the conversation, which begs the question of whether these concerns, along with an expanding agenda, add to or hinder from the goals of economic security and financial cooperation.

At an Extraordinary Leaders Summit convened by G20 in 2021 on the situation in Afghanistan, leaders expressed concerns over the deteriorating security situation and rapid rollback of human rights in Afghanistan. A section of experts and practitioners, while in agreement on countries addressing the situation in Afghanistan and expressing solidarity with its people, have raised the

question as to the G20 being the right platform to do so. There is a view that statements of support and solidarity are thought best to be limited to forums that have a human rights mandate, and issue-specific advocacy expertise, such as UN bodies or other large multilateral fora. Or, for conversations to continue bilaterally; as some G20 countries such as India play a bigger role in Afghanistan. Similarly, Indonesia's G20 presidency has been battling geopolitical tensions, largely the Ukraine crisis and growing tension in the South China Sea, which can often distract from primary objectives in discussion and deliberations.

Conflict however has effects on regional integration that could cascade further. Many of these global issues will have an economic impact on member states and beyond and the interlinkages cannot be ignored. The G20 is a powerful organisation that cannot exist in isolation. Such a body has the ability to bring important actors to the same table. Given the

population represented by the G20 members; they also have the extraordinary ability to dictate global norms. The challenge does remain for the mandate to tie in perspectives from diverse focus areas that are relevant to the core aims of the G20. The future of the

war in Ukraine is uncertain and will likely continue well into India's presidency. India will also have to bring the impending recession, food, energy, and climate crises to the agenda, while pushing for solutions and managing an expanding agenda.

Limited Cohesion Between Working Groups and Engagement Groups

An important component of the G20 mechanism are the engagement groups that represent different sections of society, including the Women 20 (W20), Think Tank 20 (T20), Business 20 (B20), Youth 20, Urban 20, and Labour 20, amongst others. Each group forms a valuable addition to the G20 process and holds different summits over the calendar year. India, during its presidency, is expected to add more groups, bringing the total to around 30 groups⁸. Given that all the leaders of the G20 convene only at the main summit, working groups and engagement groups have a limited window of opportunity to present their recommendations. The challenge to ensuring the success of working groups, is in the planning and coordination, and ensuring that priority areas of the engagement groups are brought into the larger G20 working. Also, the groups often lack a long-term advocacy strategy that continues beyond a presidency/meeting.

In the case of the W20, for example, activities throughout the year lead up to the main summit and presentation of the communique to the G20 president (the head of state/government of the host country). There is currently no mechanism to ensure that elements of the communique are plugged in to the G20 as a whole, even though gender issues are cross-cutting. There is also no mechanism of follow-up after the communique is released by G20 engagement groups, to lead to more actionable solutions, where different groups

might work with each other. For example, just as finance ministers from all G20 countries have meetings to follow up on financial regulation issues, women's rights/empowerment ministries of different countries could follow up after the release of the W20 communique. To track progress on this front, discussions would have to be convened more frequently, and be made a priority. A strong and continuous advocacy strategy from the start would also help move away from the model where the summit is the main outcome of the process.

Additionally, there is limited streamlining of priorities and objectives between groups, often leading to duplication of efforts. For example, the EMPOWER track of women business leaders under the B20 track, represent concerns of businesswomen and women entrepreneurs – a mandate which is also a part of the W20 track. Further there is little coordination between the various tracks: the EMPOWER track and the W20 did not interface until the 2022 Indonesian Presidency⁹. Engagement groups thus find themselves being boxed into categories, often with little knowledge of what other tracks are working on till documents and reports are made public. All gender and women's rights issues are now relegated to the W20 by default, think-tanks largely collaborate at the T20, and business leaders at the B20, whereas the situation that the world finds itself in, requires far more integration and understanding of how many of these concerns intersect.



Recommendations

Gender and Inclusion as a Key Component of Strategic Objectives

The understanding of gender, diversity, and equality in world affairs has evolved since the inception of the G20, which was created in response to the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. In the year 2022, it is impossible to talk about economic growth without including the significant contribution of women. We have the data and empirical evidence to show that closing the gender gap in the workforce could add 28 trillion dollars to the economy¹⁰, and that if more women were allowed to participate in the economy, they could add 146 billion pounds to the GDP alone by 2030¹¹. Gender inclusion, therefore, is a means to achieve key strategic goals, where ideas and objectives need to be discussed across all relevant engagements and working groups and not relegated to one or two groups as ‘women’s’ issues. There needs to be an understanding and acceptance that a gender and equity lens, when talking about climate, financial security, urban transformation, labour forces or other areas, is necessary.

Inclusion is a process, not a goal or an outcome. Such a process will lead to more equitable and ultimately, more stable societies. The inclusionary lens can be applied through various aspects:

- Understand the linkages between domestic and foreign issues: Linking domestic and international policies can come into play specifically in areas where India, playing to its strengths, anchors the G20 to existing domestic commitments. Inclusion for the G20 can be mapped back to the SDGs, which are an important point of consideration for India and several policies have already been put into effect. Further, domestic realities in India reveal that vulnerable groups are not just women, but also marginalised castes, religious minorities, the LGBTQ communities and gender minorities, amongst others. A broader intersectional feminist lens that reflects these diversities is therefore necessary, as is a full commitment to inclusion.
- For many countries in the Global South, inclusion is seen in economic terms. In a recent meeting between Queen Maxima of The Netherlands and President Droupadi Murmu, the leaders discussed universal financial inclusion and¹² the steady progress India has made on achieving financial inclusion¹³. Digital inclusion, one of the main pillars of the G20 and the W20, has helped

and improved financial inclusion for women. The number of Indian women who have access to bank accounts shows the progress of the Indian government in expedited digital inclusion.

- The inclusionary lens must also be applied to widen the pool of countries being invited to participate. India has announced that in addition to regular International Organizations (UN, IMF, World Bank, WHO, WTO, ILO, FSB and OECD) and Chairs of Regional Organizations (AU, AUDA-NEPAD and ASEAN), it will invite Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands,

Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and UAE as Guest countries, as well as ISA (International Solar Alliance), CDRI (Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure) and ADB (Asian Development Bank) as guest International Organisations¹⁴. This is an extremely comprehensive list that is representative of most geographies. There is also an opportunity to have a South-South Cooperation agenda in place, since Indonesia passes on the G20 baton to India, and India to Brazil and further onto South Africa, marking the first time that four Global South countries will consecutively host the presidency.

Moving Out of Crisis Mode

Since 2020, most multilateral forums and platforms have placed COVID-19-related decision-making at the core of their agendas due to the uncertain and unprecedented situation. While the pandemic is not officially over, the global community has a better understanding of a way forward. India has the opportunity to steer the G20 away from

a reactive crisis mode, and frame an agenda that moves us towards recovery, repair, and restoration. Thus, moving forward while still dealing with aftershocks, ensuring that recovery is equitable, and health security architecture is resilient to withstand future pandemic-like situations¹⁵.

Integrating Conversations and Approaches

There is a need for greater interfacing between the different working groups. Several issues are inherently cross-cutting in nature and hence, forming a horizontal axis of cooperation between different vertical engagement groups and working groups could prove beneficial. Take for example, Sustainable Finance and Green Investments: while this is a priority area for the G20 under the Finance Track, it can greatly benefit from the policy and research expertise of the T20; understanding of gendered dimensions of the energy transition from the W20; and the public-private partnership aspects from the

B20. Further, understanding from the very beginning how the proposed outcomes may affect different sections of the population, can help bring an inclusionary lens to all workings. Such integration will not only reduce duplication of efforts and bring more value to the many working groups, but also ensure that true economic security can be achieved. Additionally, it would be useful for many of the working groups to engage closely with the broader foreign policy ecosystem, researchers and domain experts who might not be directly a part of the G20 process but have a value add.

Balancing Multilateralism, Effectiveness, and the Agenda Expansion

The emerging challenges that the world will face in the coming years include a growing climate crisis, food, water, and energy security, and human security. Realistically, the G20 cannot address all crises, and must walk the tight line of being ready for the future, while also staying within its mandate. In the case of climate change, for example, the G20 can take the lead on a green transition, the push for renewable energy, sustainable and green finance, and green supply chains - thereby

tackling problems that are within its scope and expertise and those that have a direct link to smart sustainable financial recovery and security. Presiding over the G20, India must also carefully consider its alignment strategies with respect to its own foreign policy ambitions. Further, the G20 taking place in four Global South countries from 2022 to 2025 - Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa - is an opportunity to mainstream issues of the developing world that are often overlooked.

Conclusion

“I am confident that the deliberations to be held under the leadership of India will help direct G20 through the next decade”¹⁶

**– Smt. Droupadi Murmu,
President of India**

India, during its G20 presidency, has the opportunity to institutionalise policies that will determine not only its own future, but that of two-thirds of the total world population¹⁷. We hope the unpacking of the G20 workings

from an inclusionary perspective, attempted through this policy brief, will aid in galvanising the larger conversations around mechanisms, agenda setting and processes. In our previous report, Opportunities for a More Inclusive Indian Foreign Policy¹⁸, we contextualised India’s efforts at gender mainstreaming against the backdrop of the growing feminist foreign policy movement and surmised that the addition of an inclusive lens is a clear benefit to our foreign policy. India has already made great strides in this space and can learn from many of its own experiences and successes. The G20 presidency is a pivotal and exciting moment for India; it is also an opportunity to shape our approach towards a global society in flux and governance norms that need to be more reflective of the world we live in, to move towards more inclusive outcomes, and create newer paradigms of growth.

This short brief is a part of a forthcoming series by Kubernein Initiative and the India office of Konrad- Adenauer-Stiftung to bring an inclusivity lens to various aspects of India’s Foreign Policy engagement; the focus on G20 is the first. Along with research, KI engaged in roundtables, interviews, and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and experts to identify challenges and gaps and design ways forward.

We invite you to engage with us on this subject and participate in discussions at – director@kuberneininitiative.com

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 such as water and climate change, gender and foreign policy.

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.

End Notes

1. Sourced from the official G20 website: <https://g20.org/about-the-g20/>
2. Sourced from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Government website: https://www.mygiv.sa/wps/portal/snp/pages/TheSaudiG20Presidency!ut/p/z0/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfj08zi_QxdDTwMTQz9DVz8LAWCDUOw4z9LlwMQgz1gIPz9AuyHRUBRYenw!/
3. Sourced from the official Italy W20 website: <https://w20italia.it/>
4. Sourced from the official G20 Indonesia website: <https://g20.org/g20-presidency-of-indonesia/>
5. Sourced from the official G20 website: <https://g20.org/>
6. Originally stated as an answer by Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, to a question posed in the Rajya Sabha, April 7 2022: [https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/35171/QUESTION_NO4068_PRESIDENCY_ROLE_OF_INDIA_IN_G20#:~:text=\(a\)%20India%20will%20hold%20the,forum%20for%20international%20economic%20cooperation.](https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/35171/QUESTION_NO4068_PRESIDENCY_ROLE_OF_INDIA_IN_G20#:~:text=(a)%20India%20will%20hold%20the,forum%20for%20international%20economic%20cooperation.)
7. Sourced from a press release, Ministry of External Affairs, October 12 2021: https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34384/Prime_Minister_participates_in_G20_Extraordinary_Summit_on_Afghanistan
8. Sourced from a press release, Ministry of External Affairs, September 13 2022: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency
9. As told to Kubernein Initiative during a closed-door roundtable discussion and follow up interviews, and further understood through research.
10. "Women's Participation in the Global Economy", Council on Foreign Relations, last accessed in September 2022: <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-global-economy/>
11. "More Women in the Workforce: Key to Higher GDP in CEE", McKinsey & Company, January 2022: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/coronavirus-leading-through-the-crisis/charting-the-path-to-the-next-normal/more-women-in-the-workforce-key-to-higher-gdp-in-cee>
12. Sourced from a press release, Press Information Bureau, August 29 2022: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1855302>
13. Dr. Kembai Srinivasa Rao, 'Steady Progress in Financial Inclusion in India', Times of India, August 3 2022: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/kembai-speaks/steady-progress-in-financial-inclusion-in-india/>
14. Sourced from a press release, Ministry of External Affairs, September 13 2022: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35700/Indias_forthcoming_G20_Presidency
15. Dalberg, "The Disproportionate Impact Of Covid-19 On Women In India — And New Hope For Recovery Efforts", August 2021: <https://dalberg.com/our-ideas/the-disproportionate-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-in-india/#:~:text=In%20India%2C%20women%20made%20up,report%20a%20loss%20of%20rest.>
16. Republic World, July 25, 2022: <https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/president-droupadi-murmu-exudes-confidence-that-india-at-g20-will-direct-the-next-decade-articleshow.html>
17. Sourced from the official G20 website: https://www.g20.org/about_g20/g20_members
18. Kubernein Initiative, "Opportunities for a More Inclusive Indian Foreign Policy", April 2022: <https://kuberneininitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Opportunities-for-a-more-Inclusive-Indian-Foreign-Policy.pdf>

Disclaimer: © 2021 Kubernein Initiative and KAS India. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from KI and KAS India.