



TARGET
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EQUALITY



Target Gender Equality – When She Leads

“Nothing can be more unfortunate than the failure to tap and unleash the enormous potential that resides within half the world’s population. Giving women equal opportunities and space is a shared responsibility that can no longer be ignored.”



Quick facts: Vaishali Nigam Sinha – Chief Sustainability, CSR and Communications Officer, ReNew Power and Founding Chair, ReNew Foundation - India

We have 10 years to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. What are you doing to champion the Global Goals in your business?

The current pandemic situation has only heightened the importance of a sustainable future, so that we can better cope with such calamities. In this context, it is critical that governments, businesses and civil society work in unison to achieve the SDGs to create an inclusive, equitable and resilient society. This has been rightly termed the Decade of Action as there is a lot of ground we need to cover and plenty of actionables as we seek to move closer to the goals in the run up to 2030.

At ReNew Power, sustainability is core to our business DNA. We are one of India’s largest renewable energy companies with an aggregate portfolio of 10 GW including projects under various stages of development. We are currently generating 1% of India’s electricity from solar and wind and in doing so, helping to mitigate 0.5% of the country’s annual carbon emissions. We are addressing SDG 7 by providing cost effective and clean energy solutions to drive India’s economic growth. We are contributing to a cleaner and better future and helping India meet its international commitment of progressively reducing its level of carbon emissions. Backed by favourable Government policies, the Indian renewable sector has seen a rapid expansion in capacity in the last 5-6 years and ReNew Power has been at the vanguard of this transition to clean energy. Since our inception in 2011, we have grown exponentially and today operate more than 100 utility scale solar and wind projects across India and more than 450 rooftop solar sites. We plan to maintain this pace of growth and play a central role in meeting the target of 450 GW of renewables by 2030 that has been set by the Government.

Besides this, we are also influencing various other SDGs across our value chain as follows:

- SDG 17: Strengthening global partnership for sustainable development by essaying the role of a thought leader in this space, mobilizing stakeholders for discussions and sharing of ideas and best practices and charting a roadmap for action
- SDG 8: Committed to protecting labour rights and providing a safe, secure working environment for all workers, including contractual labour across our 100 + sites all over India
- SDG 5: Gender equality is an area we focus on a lot – our ReWIN programme is designed to economically empower rural women by grooming and training them as entrepreneurs through the Self-Help Group model. As an organization, we have taken concrete steps to recruit more women and foster a gender diverse work environment through appropriate policies and mentorship programmes
- SDG 6: Committed to reducing our water footprint across our operations – progressively cut down on using ground water especially for our plants in arid/semi-arid regions



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What motivates you to keep fighting for the issues you care about?

I am passionate about finding solutions to the climate crisis, which has emerged as one of the biggest threats to humanity. Women and children are much more vulnerable to the impact of climate change, with 80% of those being displaced as a result of climate change being women. Their role as primary care givers and providers of food and fuel, their comparatively higher poverty levels and lesser socio-economic power place them at a greater risk. Being a woman myself, I can fully relate to this precarious situation that women are in. Similarly, as we continue to pump carbon into the atmosphere, we are only aggravating air pollution and contributing to a steady rise in the average global temperature levels. If we do not act now, we are looking at a bleak future for the next generation. As a mother of two children, I am worried about exposing them to the adverse impacts of climate change, and somewhere feel guilty that our children may have to face the consequences of our actions or rather the lack of them, which actually worsened the crisis.

The other disturbing yet stark reality is the wide gender gap that exists in the world today. Be it health, education, income or participation in formal employment, women are lagging behind men. This is even more true in developing countries like India – due to pre-existing socio-cultural norms and often subconscious biases - deep rooted in patriarchy. One only has to look at the statistics to realize how rampant are crimes against women – be it domestic violence, rape or even female foeticide. Women have to fight discrimination, exploitation and bias (often subconscious) – which begins as a child at their homes and extends to their professional and personal lives as an adult.

The current scenario and the obvious urgency to do much more to address both these issues i.e. climate change and gender inequality is what motivates me. I want to make a meaningful contribution by raising awareness about these issues, drawing attention of stakeholders who can have an impact through policy interventions and other initiatives, discuss solutions and hopefully raise funding for affirmative action. The dream of a sustainable and gender equal socio - economic order always keeps me motivated and driven.

Can you share one obstacle that you had to overcome to achieve a successful career in business?

One obstacle that I have perceived and experienced is that men are quite often not very welcoming of a woman superior at work. There have been occasions when I have observed a fair degree of resistance and discomfort among men in my team reporting to me. Somewhere deep down, perhaps as a result of years of mental conditioning, they had an inherent feeling of being the superior or wiser gender, and this came in the way of their accepting leadership of and guidance from a woman. While some felt threatened by a woman in a leadership role, others would often display condescending undertones in their work interactions. I had to use a mix of tact and good leadership skills to defuse this cold hostility. I made sure I gave them their space and due credit for all the good work done. I succeeded in overcoming this by following an outcome focused approach to work and making the men in my team feel empowered and comfortable, as was necessary.

Can you share one barrier to women's economic empowerment that you think is overlooked or not adequately prioritized? In your opinion, what needs to happen to accelerate the pace of change?

I feel that a key barrier to economic empowerment of women is the disproportionately high volume of unpaid domestic work they have to manage. Traditionally, responsibilities like child and adult care and other household chores have been thrust upon women with men sharing none or very little of this load. In many countries including India, from an early age, children are brought up by their parents, mentally conditioned to believe that "men are bread winners and women are home makers". Gendered socio-cultural norms have for long dictated that it is the job of men to go out and work while it is the primary responsibility of women to stay indoors and manage home. While this tradition has perpetuated itself down the years, it has resulted in domestic chores and care giving taking up the bulk of a woman's time, leaving her with very little time and opportunity to pursue



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a job or other income generating opportunities. As per data women in India spend 297 minutes on unpaid domestic work each day, way more than men who contribute only 52 minutes. Being unpaid, this contribution of women is not only undervalued and under recognized, it also restricts their aspirations of pursuing a career. The other key related barrier is the gender-based wage gap that exists even in the so-called organized sector. On an average, for the same job, women earn only about 84% of what men earn while in countries like India, it dips even lower to about 81% as per 2019 data. This is blatantly unfair on women professionals who are as committed and as successful as their male counterparts. A number of factors are responsible for this including an inherent bias on employers' part, the tendency of women to avoid intense negotiations and typically accept the salary being offered and lack of transparency around salaries offered.

It is about time we acted to dismantle the above barriers that I have highlighted. Men must do their bit at home as well – it is only fair that they share the care giving and domestic tasks with the women of the house so that the latter has the time and scope to attend to her professional duties as well. It is high time that we see a change in socio cultural norms that say household work is solely a woman's job – we must now bring up our boys in such a way that they realize it is their duty to chip in and share the burden of domestic chores. This will give women the much-needed space to pursue a career and devote time and attention to discharging her official responsibilities. An important step that corporates in many Scandinavian countries have taken in this regard is to introduce long term paternity leaves and encouraging men to opt for the same. It sends a clear signal that men should also involve themselves in childcare so that women can get back to work quicker than normal. Similarly, organizations should do everything to root out gender-based pay disparity – they must offer equal pay for the same job in a totally gender-neutral manner. This must be ensured at every level across the organization. As a good practice, organizations must get themselves audited at regular intervals to ensure gender pay parity and fix anomalies, if any are detected. They should also disclose the findings of the audit and maintain transparency on this front.

What is one piece of advice you would like to share with fellow women that are aiming to shatter the glass ceiling in the business world?

Be confident and assertive and you can ace any responsibility or task. Have full faith in your abilities – you are second to none!! It is only when you have believe in yourself that others will also believe in you.

What is one piece of advice that you would like to share with male leaders?

Stand by women and give them all the necessary support they need to pursue a successful and fulfilling professional career of their choice. This has to start from your own home. Women need a supportive ecosystem in order to chase their dreams. I wish to see men chipping in more at home and sharing the burden of care giving and household chores so that women have the comfort and scope to pursue a career and perform to the best of their abilities without worrying about what's happening at home.

At the workplace, I expect male leaders to foster a work environment that is supportive to women. They should be proactive in framing policies that offer women the flexibility to balance professional and personal responsibilities and also sensitize men to rid themselves of any subconscious bias – be it while recruiting , or appraisals or allocating job roles . Male leaders must also act as mentors and groom women recruits, so that they acquire the skills needed to rise to the top.