

Climate change and its impact on women

It seems like only yesterday that I was surrounded by 15Js raising glasses of champagne while drenched in sweat in our formal suits and dresses. (The heat wave in Europe had a role to play.) We were fearless, ready to go out and be leaders in the world. My career path pre-INSEAD is familiar to many – I had lived in multiple cities – Singapore, Mumbai, London, Delhi, Lucknow; studied at one of the top engineering schools in India - IIT Madras; and joined McKinsey after six years at pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline.



Earlier this year, I became part of Homeward Bound – a global women's leadership programme that admits 80 women with science and technology backgrounds annually. This has added an additional dimension to my professional life and helped me discover my passion while I keep my day job as a consultant. Homeward Bound's vision is to elevate the role of women leaders in addressing climate change. The program involves workshops and skill building conferences through the year, all run virtually, culminating in an expedition to Antarctica in Feb

2018. I will board a ship with the 80 women – most of them strangers – living, eating, sleeping and learning at close quarters for three weeks. Due to the critical role Antarctica plays in the climate system, the expedition is an important part of the journey to build our capability as leaders for the sustainability of the planet.

You probably knew that climate change affects developing countries much worse than the developed world. But did you know that women are affected much more than men? In countries like India, Laos, Somalia and Nigeria, women bear the main burden of water collection. The distances travelled, especially in unprotected areas, to get water, and the lack of safe, private toilets make women and girls more vulnerable to violence. This slows or halts education of girls and takes time away from income-generating activities. For example, in Dengalmal, a village in India, men have two or three wives – called the 'water wives' – solely to ensure the household has enough water to drink and cook.

In the context of climate change, gender does not simply refer to women or men, but to the different roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women, which is generally associated with unequal power and access to choices and resources. There is an increasing recognition of the differential impact of climate change on women by bodies such as UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which have made gender equality part of their mandate. Due to their different experiences, women have an important role to play as leaders and agents of change, a role that is often overlooked in climate negotiations, investments and policies.

Through the year, I have been able to formalise my commitment to the role of women as leaders, and find my passion in sustainability of our planet. I draw from my own experiences at an engineering school where only 10% students were women, and at INSEAD with 30% women. For me, the values of INSEAD are coming true – diversity and global collaboration have the potential to alleviate some of the most pressing issues facing us.

As part of my commitment to gender parity and climate change, I have become an event organiser, a public speaker, a coach, a blogger, and climate change activist – definitely an unexpected journey but one that has become an indispensable part of my daily life apart from my professional commitments. I crossed the barrier of social blogging and now regularly write about research and

stories related to breaking stereotypes and the link to climate change. I conquered my fear of public speaking and actively talk at community events and business conferences. I never knew I could successfully organise events – both social and content-driven.

Next year, I plan to visit various colleges in India sharing my journey for gender parity and climate change to motivate the next generation of leaders. I am also keen to leverage my skills and knowledge to help a non-profit related to girls/women in science create long term impact. Most of all, my definition of leadership has evolved immensely - I now see leadership as a mindset – and believe that each of us can start by leading change today.

If you are interested in sharing your alumni story, please contact the UK alumni association at uk.manager@naa.insead.edu .