



INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
Day

Rights. Justice. Action.

For ALL Women and Girls.

Women Leadership

Views of Women Professionals



CS Preeti Malhotra

Vice-Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Modi Holdings Group, Former President, ICSI and Past Chairman of Smart Bharat Group

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we reaffirm a powerful mandate: *Rights, Justice, and Action—For All Women and Girls*. Women's leadership is no longer a distant aspiration; it is a living vision to be embraced, claimed, and embodied. Just as subtle seismic tremors can trigger transformative change, small yet significant shifts in the mindset of women are unleashing immense capacity to lead with strength, independence, and conviction. Intellectually and inherently, men and women are equals. True justice demands that women occupy equal space in society—space that enables them to realize their fullest potential. This belief must permeate every sphere of life: education, workplaces, governance, and homes. Historically, women were conditioned to accept secondary roles. Today, that narrative is being rewritten. Generation Y, Generation Z, and the emerging Alpha Generation are accelerating change at an unprecedented pace. Educated, economically aware, fearless, and globally connected, they refuse to tolerate inequality—whether in opportunity, pay, leadership, or relationships. Their assertiveness signals a decisive shift toward equity.

For a genuinely gender-neutral society to emerge, women must hold positions at the highest decision-making tables. Governments, industries, and communities must collaborate intentionally to make this a reality. We stand at the threshold of an exponential era shaped by AI, robotics, and STEM innovation. While technology can level the playing field, it can also replicate existing biases. Women's perspectives must shape the algorithms, policies, and governance frameworks of the future to ensure inclusivity and fairness.

In a rapidly evolving and disruptive landscape where artificial intelligence expands at a staggering rate, women cannot remain passive participants. They must be architects of progress—defining the ethics, values, and direction of tomorrow. As courage expands possibility, so too does conviction expand impact. The time to lead is now. By uniting the transformative power of technology with the resilience and vision of women, we can forge a future defined by equality, dignity, and shared progress for all.



CS (Dr.) Mamta Binani

President, MSME Development Forum - West Bengal, Former President, ICSI and Registered Insolvency Professional

Rights acquire meaning only when they move beyond documentation and translate into lived experience. For women and girls across the world, the promise of equality has long been articulated in constitutions, policies, and board resolutions. Yet, the true test lies in whether governance systems are designed to convert those rights into everyday realities.

Inclusive governance is not a symbolic gesture; it is a structural commitment. It demands that institutions consciously create spaces where women participate in decision-making, influence policy, and lead with authority. Justice, in this context, is not confined to legal recourse—it is reflected in fair representation, equal opportunity, safe workplaces, and unbiased evaluation systems.

Action is the defining differentiator. It is seen when boards prioritise diversity, when leadership pipelines are strengthened for women professionals, and when young girls are mentored to believe that leadership is not an exception but an expectation. Sustainable change does not occur through intent alone; it requires measurable accountability and consistent institutional effort.

The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI), through its emphasis on ethical governance and compliance, plays a critical role in advancing this agenda. Company Secretaries, as custodians of governance frameworks, are uniquely positioned to advocate inclusive policies, strengthen ESG commitments, and ensure that fairness becomes embedded in corporate culture.

When governance is inclusive, growth becomes equitable. When rights are protected through justice and reinforced through action, empowerment is no longer aspirational—it becomes operational.

Inclusive governance is therefore not merely about representation; it is about responsibility. And that responsibility rests with each of us to transform principles into progress—for every woman and every girl.



CS Savithri Parekh

Company Secretary & Compliance Officer, Reliance Industries Limited

The pursuit of **Rights, Justice, and Action** for all women and girls is not merely a moral aspiration; it is the cornerstone of a truly equitable society. While we have made progress, the path to true equality requires us to shift from passive advocacy to inclusive action.

This cycle begins with awareness. Rights form the legal and ethical foundation. We must recognise that rights are not privileges granted by states, but inherent entitlements including right to education, to equal pay etc. But recognition alone is insufficient. We must ensure these rights are protected through the grant of equal opportunity, implemented so that they lead to the deep, involved engagement in nation building of every woman and girl.

Justice demands more than the letter of the law. It demands we dismantle the structures that are not gender equal or gender neutral. It requires a gender-responsive approach to every global challenge including the digital revolution.

Finally, action is our engine. We must move from 'awareness' to 'impact' by supporting and mentoring young girls and professionals in meeting their aspirations and enabling their growth. Gender equality is not a 'special interest'; it is a primary economic and social necessity. Men will also participate in this journey as active allies.

The path forward is clear: Let us move from a world of potential to a world of lived equality for every woman, everywhere.



CS Geetika Anand

Company Secretary & Compliance Officer at Hindalco Industries, Aditya Birla Group

Leadership is often defined by the milestones we reach, but its true measure is the legacy of access we leave behind. Stepping into the executive ranks early in my career taught me that progress cannot be passive. As we champion this year's imperative—**Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls**—we must treat these pillars not as social abstractions, but as the very bedrock of sustainable corporate governance and economic resilience. Rights are our uncompromising baseline. In the boardroom, this translates beyond mere compliance into absolute pay equity, psychologically safe cultures, and an authoritative voice at the apex of decision-making. Upholding these rights is the prerequisite for any institution claiming to be forward-thinking.

Yet, rights on paper mean little without Justice in practice. Justice demands we dismantle the systemic architecture that has historically kept women on the periphery of power. Having frequently been the youngest—and often the only—woman in the room, I know true justice requires abandoning the comfort of superficial diversity metrics. It means cultivating environments where exceptional merit is recognized free from unconscious bias, ensuring equitable pathways to the C-suite for women across every section of society.

However, rights and justice remain dormant without bold, intentional Action. As corporate stewards, we are obligated to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality. We must replace passive mentorship with active sponsorship—putting our own professional capital on the line to elevate emerging talent. We must institutionalize policies that embrace work-life integration without stalling career momentum. Crucially, this mandate must be For ALL Women and Girls. If our progress only elevates a select few, we have merely rearranged the *status quo*. By transforming our boardrooms into true arenas of equity today, we empower the next generation to lead without boundaries tomorrow.



CS Renu Bhandari

Senior Vice-President, Head Broker Supervision and Member Compliance - National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE)

In a rapidly growing India, true women empowerment means ensuring every woman has the right to learn, earn and invest to be visible in the financial system. Justice is not only equal opportunity but equal outcome in pay, leadership team, access to boardrooms and decision making.

When it comes to actions it should include implementing comprehensive policies against gender based violence, increasing female representation in leadership team. Women empowerment is not just opening doors, it is about ensuring women thrive after they walk through them.



CS Divya Tandon

Former Executive Director & Company Secretary, Powergrid Corporation of India Ltd.

The words **“Rights, Justice, and Action”** resonate strongly with many women who pursue professional careers. While obtaining the Company Secretary qualification provides an entry into the profession, building a strong and established presence within it is often a challenging journey.

Although the Constitution of India guarantees justice and equality for women through Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21, and Article 51A(e) calls upon citizens to renounce practices that undermine the dignity of women, the reality remains complex. Deep-rooted historical gender biases and social prejudices continue to result in the underrepresentation of women across most professions.

As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar rightly said:

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which the women have achieved.”

The theme “Rights, Justice and Action” for women and girls in 2026 underscores that significant work still lies ahead. Stronger safeguards, greater access to leadership roles, and more evolved, inclusive policies are essential to truly empower women. Concrete and measurable action to promote women’s leadership is the need of the hour.

In the specific context of the Company Secretary profession, women must thoughtfully consider the role they play in shaping their own meaningful and fulfilling futures. The regulatory and legal environment is evolving rapidly, with significant advancements taking place. As women gain experience, visibility, and career progression, it becomes imperative to continuously upgrade their skills and embrace lifelong learning. Knowledge remains the strongest asset, and proactive upskilling will open doors to greater professional opportunities.

Moreover, Artificial Intelligence is emerging as a powerful transformative force across industries. Women professionals must actively adopt and adapt to these technological shifts. By cultivating a long-term vision, stepping into strategic roles, asserting autonomy, upholding high standards of integrity, and building networks beyond their immediate organizations, they can unlock their full potential and create sustainable career pathways.

Finally, while striving to generate value for their organizations and achieving financial independence, women should also prioritize their well-being. Professional success must go hand in hand with becoming healthy, empowered, and balanced individuals.



Prof. (Dr.) Ruhi Paul

Professor of Law & Registrar, National Law University, Delhi

International Women's Day is both a celebration of progress and a call to conscience. This year's theme **“Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls”** underscores a fundamental truth: equality must move beyond aspiration to implementation.

Ensuring rights for women and girls requires more than acknowledgment; it demands sustained commitment. Justice must not remain an abstract ideal but must be reflected in our laws, institutions, and everyday practices. Action, therefore, becomes our shared responsibility: to remove structural barriers, expand access to quality education, and create environments where every woman and girl can thrive with dignity and confidence.

In legal education and institutional governance, our role is especially significant. By equipping young women with knowledge, ethical grounding, and leadership opportunities, we strengthen not only individual futures but the foundation of a just society. When rights are protected, justice is upheld, and meaningful action is taken, inclusive leadership naturally follows.

On this International Women's Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to advancing rights, strengthening justice systems, and taking deliberate action - ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.

Let us continue to lead with purpose, integrity, and resolve.



Ms. Raavi Birbal

Advocate, Supreme Court and Delhi High Court

With the right professionals, world economics can boom. Skilled professionals can be true game-changers for the global economy. Individually as well as collectively, they can form a vital part of economic growth. The global economy stands to gain trillions by unlocking full potential of women and girls. The 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) is thus going to be an important one.

Professionals play a crucial compliance, advisory, and ethical role in ensuring that organizations follow laws meant to promote the safety, dignity, equality, and empowerment of women. Proper legal compliance helps prevent penalties and legal exposure. Effective policy framing and implementation including well-drafted policies on POSH, equal opportunity, maternity benefits, anti-discrimination etc. can go a long way in fostering individual development and economic empowerment. This not only benefits women but also safeguards entities from heavy penalties and reputational risks.

Ethical governance includes promoting gender equality, dignity, respect. In their board advisory role, professionals must guide boards on gender diversity, workplace safety, corporate social responsibility initiatives for women. Such progressive stances attract foreign investment, as ethics, governance, compliances are primary factors that global companies consider before investing.

For awareness and training, organizations should conduct sensitization programs, legal compliance workshops, and gender equality awareness drives. In whatever role they serve, corporate professionals must act as guardians of compliance, champions of ethical governance, protectors of workplace dignity, and facilitators of gender justice.

India's legal framework provides a robust foundation for gender justice, from constitutional guarantees to specialized legislations addressing workplace safety, domestic violence, sexual harassment, equal remuneration etc. However, the challenge lies in effective implementation. Strategic litigation, policy advocacy, corporate governance reforms can together bridge the gap between law on paper and justice in practice. By embedding diversity policies, strengthening POSH compliance, promoting pay equity, and fostering inclusive workplaces, professionals can significantly influence corporate culture and accountability.

Action is the defining element. Every advisory, contract, policy, and courtroom argument is an opportunity to advance gender justice. The call of our time is clear: rights must be protected, justice must be delivered, and action must be sustained. This is not merely a professional responsibility, it is a constitutional and moral imperative for organizations and individuals alike.



Ms. Poyni Bhatt

Chairperson of SEDEMAC & Founding member and Ex-CEO of the Society for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (SINE)

Every year on 8th March, conversations around women's empowerment and leadership gather momentum as the world celebrates International Women's Day. The day commemorates women's long struggle for equality, liberation, and rights. Its origins trace back to the early 20th century as "Women's Day," later embraced by socialist and labour movements across Europe and North America.

In 1975, the United Nations formally recognized 8th March as International Women's Day. This history reminds us that gender disparity is not a recent concern; women have been fighting for equality for over a century, and the struggle is far from complete.

Having worked in innovation and entrepreneurship for over two decades, I see that only about 5-10% of venture capital funding is received by women entrepreneurs. Yet, evidence suggests that women-led startups foster stronger gender inclusion. Startups with at least one female founder have significantly more women in senior roles than male-founded ventures. With rising female enrolment in higher education, particularly in STEM, the potential for future women entrepreneurs is strengthening. Policy interventions, mentoring, grants, and targeted funds are helping bridge the gap. But true gender parity requires collective societal effort from both men and women to consciously reshape their roles, at work and at home, where empowerment becomes a practice, not an annual event.



Prof. Rajni Abbi

Director South Campus, University of Delhi and Ex-Mayor, Delhi

On this International Women's Day, the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) celebrates the strength, resilience, and achievements of women across the globe. The theme '*Rights, Justice, Action for Women and Girls*' resonates deeply with our commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable society. Women are the backbone of our communities, driving progress and innovation in every sphere. The ICSI is empowering women with the tools, opportunities, and support they need to thrive. Whether it's breaking glass ceilings in corporate boardrooms or leading social change

initiatives, women's contributions are invaluable. Let's take a pledge today to:

- Advocate for equal opportunities.
- Stand against discrimination and injustice.
- Support women's education and growth.
- Celebrate women's achievements.

To all the incredible women, you are seen, you are heard, and you are valued. Here's to creating a future that's bright and inclusive for all.



Dr. G. Mythili

Additional Director, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

Power of Reciprocity and Support to Women in Society

The development of any society is indistinguishably tied to the strength, resilience, and leadership of women. The law of reciprocity, which is defined by the provision of support, knowledge, opportunity, and encouragement, creates a strong cycle of development that works for the individual as well as the community. When women participate in mutual empowerment, share experiences, and offer opportunities, the effects of these knowledge and experiences transform to the next generation. The sign of giving back is transmuted from a transaction to a responsibility. When it comes to the

workplace, empowerment helps women overcome challenges and barriers. In the community, it can enhance confidence, entrepreneurship, and engagement. In the education and skills development sector, empowered engagement can help transform aspirations into reality.

In my capacity as an academican at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), I have noticed that the availability of inclusive and flexible education opportunities has enabled women from various socio-economic backgrounds to move forward. Many women learners, who have been juggling family and work responsibilities, have been able to move ahead in their lives through the collective support and motivation they receive. The creation of opportunities through digital learning, capacity building, and leadership development leads to the propagation of these opportunities by women in their families and social environments.

Reciprocity builds social capital. When institutions, decision-makers, and societies work towards the empowerment of women, they create a culture of innovation, integrity in leadership, and social equality. Every gesture of mentoring, every opportunity created, and every hurdle removed brings women not just into the fold but into leadership positions.

While reflecting on the importance of reciprocity, it is important to re-emphasize a collective commitment to creating an enabling environment where women support women, institutions support women, and society as a whole understands that the empowerment of women is not just a gesture of goodwill but a viable option for sustainable development.



Ms. Sonal Garg

DGM - Human Resources, Hinduja Group, Mumbai

International Women's Day is an occasion to celebrate the progress women have made, a reminder of our responsibility to accelerate it, and an opportunity to dream about our future together. Women today are forging ahead in every field of their choice, reshaping the narrative of leadership in boardrooms, laboratories, newsrooms, sports arenas and even space – you name it!

In the corporate world – women are driving sustainable and responsible growth, championing ethics and governance while building purpose-driven institutions. In sports, they inspire strength, discipline and competitive spirit. In arts, they challenge boundaries and redefine stereotypes.

As we stand on the shoulders of generations of women who strived before us, we have many success stories to inspire us. Yet there is a pressing need for systemic changes to enable more women to achieve their dreams – from equal opportunities in education and workplace, to robust support systems ranging from child care to elder care, inclusive policies and much more. Mentorship programs can open a great many doors for generations that follow. What we need today, is an inclusive and supportive environment in all spheres of life – from home and schools to health institutions and workplaces – where Women can grow and thrive. Let us pledge to continue this journey and extend a hand to lift one another higher.

When women lead, societies grow stronger, people become more compassionate, and the future becomes brighter.

Wishing everyone a very Happy International Women's Day!



Dr. Anjali Desai

Head HR & Admin, Fourth Partner Energy

From Rights to Results: Making Women's Leadership Business as Usual

When I began my career over three decades ago, I walked into a boardroom where I was the only woman present and was politely asked if I was there to take notes. I smiled, took my seat, and presented the workforce plan instead. That moment stayed with me—not because it was unusual, but because it was familiar to many women.

The theme **“Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls”** resonates deeply with me because leadership is not just about finding a seat at the table; it is about ensuring the table is fair, accessible, and strong enough to support everyone. Rights must be non-negotiable—safe workplaces, equal pay, dignity, and voice. Justice must be systemic embedded in governance frameworks, transparent processes, and unbiased decision-making. Action is where credibility lies—when policies move beyond presentations and become everyday practice.

Over the years, I have seen that women do not lack ambition or competence. What they often lack is sponsorship at critical moments, flexibility during life transitions, and leaders willing to question longstanding norms. As Maya Angelou wisely said, *“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”*

Real change happens when intent is followed by persistence. Glass ceilings rarely shatter on their own—they need consistent tapping, sometimes with a policy handbook. As governance professionals and leaders, translating values into institutions makes women's leadership business as usual.



Dr. Minu Madlani

Director, KPB Hinduja College of Commerce, Mumbai

There is every reason for good cheer on the future of “Empowerment of women” as the digital age advances. While the earlier waves of automation, by mechanizing mainly ‘simple tasks’ and ‘repeatable tasks’, had potential to put at risks more jobs done by women rather than men. The future autonomous waves could substitute physical labour and manual dexterity, and problem solving in dynamic real-world situations that require responsive actions, such as in transport and construction. Gender neutrality may be significantly enhanced through (i) increased access to higher education, (ii) increased employability through skills that are gender neutral, (iii) awareness and access to job opportunities, (iv) awareness of rights and entitlements of law.

Altogether role of *Time* and *Distance* shall become less important in organizing activities, *inter alia* because (i) unprecedented convergence of new technologies eliminates isolation and facilitates voice, (ii) social media ventilates women's issues not covered by mainstream media.

This will translate into important change in workplace culture lending flexibility to work beyond office. Nearly 75% of new generation think “work from home” or “work remotely” policy is progressive, and this could be beneficial especially for women with small children reaffirming their ancient status as universal mother Goddess and “*Creatrix*” – sustaining the species.

So reversing the inequality and subordination which commenced with division of labour on farms and early industrial revolution, where physical nature of work and working conditions made most outdoor jobs male dominated, in the coming age digital overlay through computing may make these further accessible to both genders. Emancipation shall overcome patrilineal systems, & Hammurabis Code, and empowerment of women will proceed apace with a re-evaluation of their role and upskilling.



Dr. Aparna Rao

Associate Professor, School of Technology Management & Engineering, NMIMS and Regional Convener (West), GUESSS India

A couple of years ago, during a women's empowerment initiative in a tribal region, I witnessed a striking contrast. In a remote village, not far from Mumbai, these women-led self-help groups demonstrate resilience, capability, and a will to learn new skills. This young widow in her early twenties, with 3 kids and aging in-laws, bravely battling hunger with small jobs and yet, dreaming of education and access for her children - her aspirations are bold—she wants education for her kids, and seeks dignity of a sustainable livelihood. For her and her peers, the ecosystem around them remains fragile with limited infrastructure, restricted access to opportunity, and minimal institutional support. I was also told that this is a matriarchal society; yet, in my interactions, I observed that the phones, mobility, spending power, and decision-making remained largely with the men. This experience revealed a truth we must confront – talent and aspiration are universal; access and opportunity are not. This year theme **‘Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls’** – is a much-needed call for responsible action by all of us who operate from positions of privilege and influence. International Women's Day must therefore compel us to design systems that are intentional about access—access to finance, markets, education, networks, and decision-making spaces.