



**Reframing South Asian
Regional Cooperation
In the New Context**
National and Global Dimensions

4-5 November 2023, Dhaka, Bangladesh



Parallel Session C3
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
Sunday, 5 November 2023 | 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Venue: Nawab, Sheraton Dhaka

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Gender equality and women's empowerment remain a significant concern within the South Asian nations as the region witnesses a substantive transformation while advancing towards extensive economic growth and development. Yet, despite the notable progress made by South Asia pertaining to physical and human capital accumulation, strengthening infrastructure as well as trade and thereby productivity, the region still struggles with continued disparities concerning women. South Asian economies must intensify their endeavours to narrow the gender inequality gap.

The South Asian Region has taken a pivotal role with the adoption of the Beijing Declaration in 1995 which was recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996, to design policies, schemes, and action plans aimed at improving women's empowerment in the region (ESCAP 2015). However, women in South Asian countries are still experiencing substantial challenges due to a lack of adequate economic opportunities, sufficient access to health and education, and low levels of female labour force participation with limited representation of women in the parliament and in decision-making roles or leadership positions. Furthermore, women also lack sufficient access to finance and are subjected to a persistent wage gap while being socially disempowered with the pervasive issue of violence against women remaining a key concern.

Guiding Questions for the Panellists

1. What is the most important challenge that impedes gender equality and women's empowerment within South Asia?
2. What can be done to encourage and facilitate more women to pursue higher education?
3. What part can the digital economy play to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment?
4. How can the social infrastructure aid in enabling women to participate more in the labour force?

5. What are the necessary policies and steps that can be conducive for working mothers, enabling them to maintain a work-life balance and improve their career growth?
6. Why are women hardly seen in leadership positions?
7. What can be done to facilitate women entrepreneurs within the South Asian region?
8. Can regional cooperation help women-led businesses, in particular SMEs, in South Asia to engage in cross-border trade?
9. What possible steps can be taken to reduce the violence against women and improve women's well-being?
10. What can be done to ensure that the existing policies that facilitate more equity for women are effectively implemented?