



**Ideate**  
2025 *from ideas to action*

# MARGIN TO MAINSTREAM

Empowering Women to Lead!

Wednesday, 24 September 2025

Bansidhar & Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF), in partnership with FICCI, successfully concluded the 14th edition of its annual flagship conference, **IDEATE 2025**. The theme, "Margin to Mainstream: Empowering Women to Lead," celebrated women's growing influence across corporate boardrooms, politics, and grassroots movements. The conclave aimed to bridge persisting inequities despite inspiring examples of women redefining power, purpose, and progress.

Held on **24 September 2025**, the event brought together influential voices and change makers to deliberate on the systemic and societal barriers hindering women's representation in decision-making roles. Through thought-provoking dialogues, **IDEATE 2025** sought to catalyze, enable, and inspire women to lead with confidence and impact.

The conference featured three dynamic sessions focused on amplifying women's voices, strengthening pathways for equitable participation, and fostering inclusive growth, reaffirming BIPF's commitment to promoting authentic, inclusive, and transformative leadership for a more equitable future.

## INAUGURAL SESSION

# Redefining Leadership: A Vision for Gender Inclusive Power



**Ms Shaifalika Panda**

Founder,  
Bansidhar & Ila Panda Foundation

Ms Shaifalika Panda, in her opening address called for dismantling systemic barriers limiting women's leadership potential. Highlighting that women make up nearly half the global workforce yet only 10% of Fortune 500 CEOs, she described this gap as a sign of untapped potential and unheard voices.

Celebrating women's resilience, empathy, and collaboration, she urged, "For every empowered woman, let there be thousands more whose voices are heard—even within their households."

Ms Panda emphasised that women must not only find a seat at the table but be empowered to redesign it. Aligning with Viksit Bharat 2047, she amplified, "Transformation requires conviction, partnership, and action," envisioning a future where women truly thrive.

She urged stakeholders to turn words into action by reshaping workplaces, strengthening mentorship, and making inclusion a cultural norm. "Real transformation demands belief, collaboration, and decisive execution," she concluded, calling for collective efforts to help women not just rise but thrive.

Padma Shri Shobhana Bhartia, in her special address, thanked BIPF and FICCI and called for redefining leadership to make it truly gender-inclusive.

She highlighted the paradox of celebrating women achievers while denying equal opportunities to many, stressing that empowerment is not charity but a right. Citing leaders like Indira Gandhi, Indra Nooyi, and grassroots women changemakers, she noted that less than 5% of top Indian companies have women CEOs, urging bold reforms like equal pay, safe transport, childcare, and skilling.

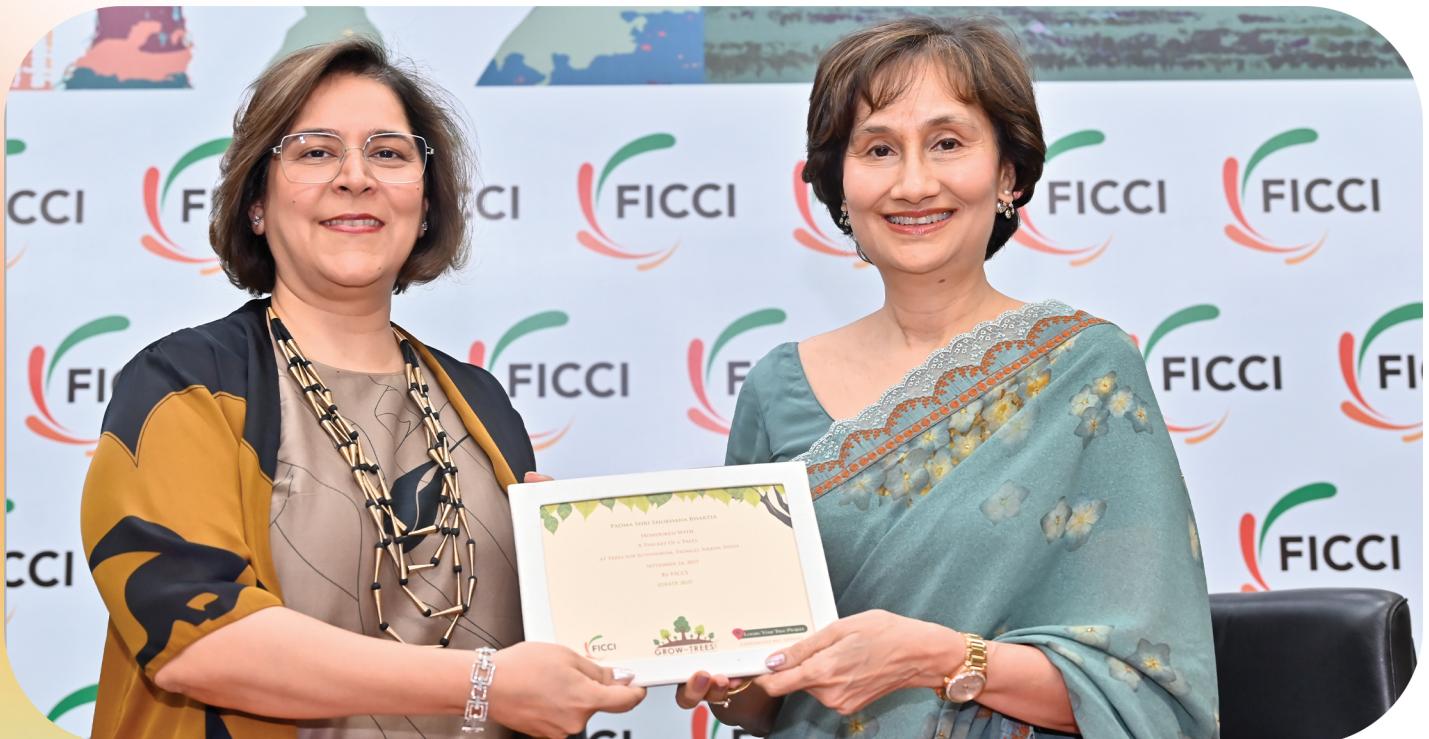
Ms Bhartia underscored that empowering women is both a social necessity and an economic imperative, with equal participation capable of boosting GDP by 30%. She called for empathy-driven leadership, mentorship for young women, and stronger representation in governance.

Concluding, she said, "The question is not whether India can afford to empower women—the truth is, India cannot afford not to."



**Padma Shri Shobhana Bhartia**

Chairperson and Editorial Director,  
HT Media Limited



## PANEL DISCUSSION

### Margin to Mainstream: Strategies for Empowerment



#### Ms Roshika Singh

Principal Country Officer, India Country Team, IFC India

Ms Roshika Singh moderated the panel, underscoring the importance of women's ownership and recognition in economic opportunities. Sharing her own experience, she reflected that even in educated families, women often struggle for education and autonomy. She concluded that true inclusion demands systemic change to ensure women's participation, ownership, and recognition across all spheres, creating real pathways from margin to mainstream.



#### Ms Sara Abdullah Pilot

Founder & Chairperson, CEQUIN (Center for Equity and Inclusion)

Ms Sara Abdullah Pilot opined that gender mainstreaming must be integral to every policy and not confined to a single ministry or department. She noted that women's issues often become "everyone's problem, but no one's responsibility," calling for gender to be embedded across all sectors. Highlighting systemic blind spots—like prioritising underpasses over safer overbridges, she stressed the need to engage men and boys as allies, noting that true equality requires inclusion of all. "When a park or public space is safe for girls, it's safe for everyone," she concluded.



#### Mr Vijay Mahajan

Founder, BASIX Social Enterprise Group

Mr Vijay Mahajan reflected on the transformative journey of women's empowerment through SHGs since 1987. Today, over 1.15 crore SHGs link 16 crore women to banks, mobilising ₹3.5 lakh crore in credit, a true shift "from margin to mainstream." He reinforced that access to capital, not just credit, is vital for sustainable empowerment, and that women thrive as entrepreneurs through mutual mentoring and collective resilience. True inclusion, he noted, requires strengthening financial, human, and social capital to help women move from microenterprises to leadership in mainstream economic and corporate spaces.



#### Ms Aradhana Rai Gupta

Co-founder, Project Baala

Ms Aradhana Rai Gupta highlighted that 25% of girls drop out of school after puberty due to poor menstrual awareness and access, while working women lose up to 33% of productivity for similar reasons. She amplified building an ecosystem that integrates education, WASH facilities, infrastructure, and inclusive policy, with active involvement of men and boys. In the corporate space, she urged embedding women's health in workplace policies through clean facilities, flexibility, and open dialogue. "When women's health is prioritised," she said, "workplaces become truly equitable and productive."

## FIRESIDE CHAT

# Invisibility and Influence



**Moderated by**  
**Ms Shaifalika Panda**

Founder, BIPF

Moderated by Ms Shaifalika Panda, the session brought forth the idea that women's empowerment grows through shared journeys, amplified voices, and the quiet strength of everyday courage.

### **Padma Shri Naina Lal Kidwai**

**Chairperson, Rothschild & Co India, Past President, FICCI**

Padma Shri Naina Lal Kidwai described women's leadership as "strength" and called resilience key. Reflecting on her work in women's empowerment and water conservation, she noted these are "cross-cutting issues that touch dignity, education, and inclusivity." On women's role in India's growth, she said, "Each of us has a role to play. You can inspire someone else to rise," emphasising collective action and empathy for a truly Viksit Bharat.

### **Ms Muskan Kushwaha**

**KARM Fellow**

Ms Muskan Kushwaha shared her journey from selling diyas with her father to becoming a changemaker, embodying "Margin to Mainstream." She shared how digital platforms give women visibility, voice, and agency: "For the longest time, women were part of someone else's story. Now, we are becoming storytellers." She concluded, "Never let anything dim your light. Share opportunities, uplift others, and let's build sisterhood together."

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The conclave concluded with key insights from the discussions:

#### **Redefine Leadership**

Leadership should be inclusive, empathetic, and purpose-driven, enabling women not just to find a seat at the table but to redesign it.

#### **Bridge Systemic Gaps**

Structural barriers persist; collective action across policy, workplaces, and communities is vital.

#### **Invest in Ecosystems**

Empowerment requires mentorship, networks, skilling, financial inclusion, and supportive environments.

#### **Mainstream Gender**

Gender equality must be integrated across all sectors, with men and boys engaged as allies.

#### **Prioritize Health & Storytelling**

Holistic inclusion addresses women's health, safe infrastructure, and uses authentic stories to increase visibility and inspire leadership.

#### **Sustain Momentum**

True transformation requires conviction, partnership, and long-term commitment, making inclusion a cultural norm.

### **About Bansidhar and Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF)**



Bansidhar and Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF) was established in 2011 to implement sustainable and scalable interventions in the areas of health, education, livelihood, and water and sanitation, building on decades of community development initiatives by the Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Ltd. (IMFA). Today, BIPF is a premier on-ground implementation partner structured to collaborate with the Central and State governments as well as local and international organisations to implement programs and drive results for the marginalised and underserved communities of Odisha.

### **About our partner Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)**



FICCI is the voice of India's business and industry. Established in 1927, it is India's oldest and largest apex business organization. It serves its members from the Indian private and public corporate sectors and multinational companies, drawing its strength from diverse regional chambers of commerce and industry across states, reaching out to over 2,50,000 companies. In Odisha, FICCI has five sectoral councils such as electricity, mining, tourism, manufacturing, and micro, small & medium enterprises (MSME).

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