

# Women-up Tamil Nadu

## *Why Women-Up, Tamil Nadu?*

Women-up Tamil Nadu was founded on the belief that action is more important than words when it comes to solving the long standing socio-economic gender equality issues. It is our vision and mission to empower women and girls in our home state of Tamil Nadu, and through our actions and accomplishments inspire Women-up movements in all the states across India. By forming powerful networks of women dedicated to a common cause, and by learning from each other and collaborating with each other, we believe that we can accelerate change. Our premise is that for every positive action there is a chain reaction that will unleash the latent power of women and girls to build a stronger and more sustainable Indian economy and society.

Women-up, Tamil Nadu was formed in February, 2023 with a group of 20 women who aspire to work for the community by supporting them in education, healthcare, social and economic empowerment. This cohort came together for the first time to participate in a roundtable hosted by Dr. Valli Arunachalam and organised by Apogee Research Forum on February 24-25, 2023 at Raintree, Anna Salai.

## *What will they do?*

This cohort of women leaders will form small working groups to focus on the three objectives that were identified during the first roundtable discussion held on February 24-25, 2023. The working groups will utilise their organisation resources, strengths and networks collectively and invest in the commitments that can be found in the later part in this document.

## *How will they work?*

This diverse cohort has the bandwidth of information and capacity to undertake tasks as required for their commitments. The responsibilities taken up during this Roundtable although is voluntary, to ensure there is consistent effort made towards realising the goals, a metric system to assess and evaluate the impact of their work will be developed during the course of their commitment period.

## *First Roundtable on Women Empowerment*

The event was engineered to engage strong, committed, passionate, and aspiring women from diverse occupational backgrounds to steer a conversation around gender equality and how to convert it to a right, entitlement and opportunity for the gender and sexual minorities in India. The all-women roundtable conference brings in 20 eminent experts from diverse fields who represent art directors, academicians, entrepreneurs, scientists, journalists, social workers, policy makers and sport professionals into action. The discussions from the roundtable will be translated into actionable steps through 'Working Groups' setup by this cohort. The event culminates in drawing up a charter or a call-to-action document otherwise a 'Womanifesto' that will include the commitments and necessary action

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steps as agreed by the members of the different Working Groups. The Womanifesto will also include measurable implementation framework along with a brief road map to execute them.

## *Women-up Tamil Nadu's three main objectives are:*

(i) To actively promote and encourage more women owned businesses in Tamil Nadu with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion practices that enables them to compete in markets in general and specifically in STEAM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

(ii) To support marginalised communities and women from weaker sections of the society to fight for their social and economic rights. Through community outreach programs and creating awareness about their rights and entitlements, to empower them socially and economically.

(iii) To improve access to education and healthcare for women and girls by ensuring better delivery of services with the support of grassroots organisations and private sector that has the resources to build the social infrastructure.

We thank members for their time and look forward to working with them.



**Members of Women-up Tamil Nadu with Apogee Research Forum (implementing Partner), Dr.Valli Arunachalam (host) and Ms. Judith Ravin, Consul General, US Consulate General (keynote speaker)**

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## WOMANIFESTO 2023 BY WOMEN-UP, TAMIL NADU

### **1. Women Leadership and Entrepreneurship**

In the short term, to provide mentoring and training programs ( internal and external) for women for skills development and leadership roles; to encourage private companies to mandate allocation of a percentage of CSR (corporate social responding) funding for women empowerment; to engage in dialogues with both public sector and private companies to introduce policies that will empower women at work. To plug the holes in the leaky pipeline to the top it is important to provide for flexible work hours, rejoining program for mothers, onsite childcare facilities among other gender affirmative policies; to Identify women with leadership potential and implementation of leadership shadowing programs.

In the long term, participate in policy/ legislative discussions to establish higher quotas for women in leadership positions at the board level as well as at lower levels with stricter enforcement and benefits for compliance. To achieve these objectives, the cohort will partner with two companies in Tamil Nadu to identify and implement programs to increase the percentage of women in the workforce at all levels and facilitate their rise up the ladder to leadership positions. The team will prepare a concept note with specific recommendations, followed by discussions with the management team to finalize pilot projects to implement the same.

### **2. Social and Economic Empowerment**

To amalgamate resources that will support activities that promote psychological, mental, emotional wellness of women and girls; to provide life skills including self defense, financial literacy, legal literacy, women focused schemes and programs, digital literacy; to create awareness regarding start-up programs, markets, funds and grants-seeking. The target groups have been identified as teachers (government school, anganwadi), Self Help Groups, Consumer Business Organisation, Non-Profit Organisation and students

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### **3. Healthcare and Education of girls and women**

To enable women and girls from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised communities to get access to school education including higher education by addressing health and mobility barriers. Specific focus will be made towards gradual replacement of sanitary napkins with menstrual cups for school children by following the Kerala government model that involves grassroot organisations in distribution and measuring impact. As drug peddling and substance abuse problems are increasing among youth, awareness programs to educate children and parents on the ill effects of drugs on physical, mental, emotional wellness will be undertaken. Social stigma around menstrual hygiene, poor toilet and sanitation facilities have a huge negative impact on education. A strategic plan to distribute free menstrual cups and to nudge for policies that mandate clean toilet facilities in schools will be developed.

In our contemporary world, problems are discussed and opinions are framed over a click of a mouse or often in few words (tweet). Much is lost when deliberations fails, voices are silenced and participation is limited. This mostly results in unreasonable, unlogic and unreliable information that sources many incorrect beliefs and narratives. In such environment, the never ending discussions around women issues otherwise on gender inequality is a lost cause.

To make conversations and dialogues meaningful, it is important to translate them into actions and to measure impact to see desirable outcomes in the society. While we engage in action steps, it is equally important to enable men to understand that women must be treated as equal. Lest we forget about psychological empowerment of women.

Psychological empowerment is to be aware of ones desires, to understand ones abilities and to translate them into actions, to ensure results of actions that will benefit the society and contribute to communities.

***Dr. Nappinnai Seran, Psychologist***

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Women and Girls make up half the world's population. Yet far too often, their voices, experiences, and contributions are overlooked or undervalued. While women's voices are critical to global security, prosperity, and peace, there are challenges that often hold them back- lack of opportunity, mentorship, training or family support. Social, legal, and financial barriers remain. The Covid-10 pandemic has also had a disproportionate effect on women's employment, with devastating effects on families, communities, and economies.

In President Biden's words, "governments, economies, and communities are stronger when they include the full participation of women.

*Judith Ravin, Consul General, US Consulate General, Chennai*

This high-level roundtable discussion was an opportunity to speak without inhibitions on gender inequality focusing particularly on women and girls. The robust arguments and deliberations have paved the way for the commitments of the 2023 Women-up call to action. It was a moment to reflect on women's experiences and realise the importance of working together to bring about a change among the women community. "I am confident this dynamic group will rise to the challenge of solution oriented discourse around women contributing to their full potential, whole making our economies more prosperous" said Judith Ravin, Consul General, US Consulate General in Chennai. We must hope that this spirit continues outside this room and translate into actions and measurable deliverables.

## **MEMBERS OF WORKING GROUPS**

### ***Women Leadership and Entrepreneurship***

Dr. Valli Arunachalam, Nuclear Scientist & Semiconductor Technologist; Sandhya Pentareddy, ED, VIT; Preethi Mohan, Advocate; and Kavitha Narasimhan, Auditor; Abirami Manoharan, Cyclist & Founder, Veloce; Anju G Parvathy, Vice President - research & Solutions, Avtar, India's premier Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Solutions firm; and Prof Indumathi Nambi, IIT Madras.

### ***Social and Economic Empowerment***

Suchitra Sebastian, Physicist in Cambridge University; Dr.; Vanessa Peter, Founder-Information and Resource Centre for Deprived Urban Communities' (IRCDUC); Archana Stalin, Founder, myHarvest Farms; Dr Sudharshini, Asst Prof, Madras Medical College; and Kavitha Muralidharan, Journalist.

### ***Healthcare and Education of girls and women***

Neerja Malik, Cancer Counsellor and Inspirational Speaker; Rajashri Sai, CEO & Founder- Impactree; Ritika Reddy, CEO, CrowdWave; Dr. Anbu Arumugam, Prof, Nandanam Govt College; and Akila Venkalpati, Co-Founder Aki Mi's Gourmet.

<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Host</b>	<b>Implementing Partner</b>	<b>Media Partner</b>
MV Murugappa Trust	Dr. Valli Arunachalam	Apogee Research Forum	The News Minute