

Clean Technologies can promote Inclusive Growth

India-US Relations, Gender Equality Topics at Ideas India 2009

The first morning of Ideas India 2009 organised by Aspen Institute India from 17-19 December in New Delhi addressed a number of pertinent issues relating to Indo-US relations, gender equality and clean energy technologies.

The session "Can Clean Energy Solve the Problem of Inclusive Growth in India?" brought forth interesting ideas to develop and promote clean technologies, which could lead to sustainable and equitable growth. Moderator Mr. Tarun Das, President, Aspen Institute India appreciated industry initiatives such as those led by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), CII Centre of Excellence of Sustainable Development and the CII-Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre and stated that industry efforts must be multiplied in promoting the use of clean technologies, especially among the Small and Medium Enterprises.

Mr. Jamshyd Godrej, Chairman Emeritus, Aspen Institute India and Chairman of the Board of Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Company Limited, highlighted that despite being among the lowest per capita emitters, India's emissions intensity is among the highest in the world, underscoring the scope for emissions reductions. Starting with power plants, industrial efficiency, appliances, vehicles and green buildings, clean technologies can play an instrumental role in promoting inclusive growth. India needs to undertake a full-fledged study evaluating direct as well as indirect costs.

Mr. Shyamal Gupta, Chairman, TCE Consulting Engineers & Special Advisor - Tata International Ltd. explained that the efficiency of solar energy based technologies is on the rise and that in the next three years, it can meet 20-25% of India's energy needs. He also suggested greater R&D for development of new solar technologies and transferring subsidies from petroleum-based products into the renewable energy sector, which would make them more efficient, widely available and more affordable. Mr. Dilip Chenoy, Director General, SIAM, said the right combination of Pricing, Policy and Partnerships is essential for clean energy to address inclusive growth and that the cost of green energy solutions must be built-in and the pricing of services must be made to match.

There was a broad consensus among the panelists at the session "A New Chapter in Indo-US relations: Undoing the Past?", that the bilateral relationship between India and the US has witnessed significant improvement in last few years and the two countries need to further deepen their engagement in areas such as health, education and training, and infrastructure cooperation among others.

Panelists felt that the global economic slowdown may have reduced the focus of US administration towards further improving the Indo-US relationship. However, they expressed hope that an economic recovery in the US would further elevate their relationship to newer heights. The panelists identified climate change, non-proliferation and the Afghanistan-Pakistan policy of the US as potential irritants to a deeper India - US economic relationship.

Speakers at the session felt that the increased focus on the China-US relationship in recent times is a byproduct of the current global economic slowdown, since the two countries are economically dependant on each other.

The speakers at the session included Mr. Sanjaya Baru, Editor, Business Standard; Mr. Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of History and Director, South Asia Initiative, Harvard University; Ms. Arundhati Ghose, Former Indian Ambassador to the United Nations; and Mr. Vijay Thadani, CEO, NIIT Ltd.

Another parallel session on gender issues 'Changing Gender Stereotypes: can Patriarchal Mindsets Change?' attempted to answer the question whether patriarchal mindset towards women was changing at a desired pace. Some panelists felt that the patriarchal system of family dictating social mores, societal relations, familial interactions and professional relations have indeed been changing over the past several decades. The changes have been seen in legal empowerment of women, larger participation of women in jobs, greater number of women becoming successful entrepreneurs, widening of their representation in public policy and forum, recent judgments, etc.

It was, however, pointed out that the journey to securing a society based on equality of men and women was still far from complete. Representation of women in overall socio-economic system is still very meager. One of the apt examples of this is that only 15% of the total entrepreneurs in the country are women, which compares unfavorably with many developed nations where it is around two-thirds. There is need to continue sustained efforts towards creating a system which is just and offers equal rights and opportunities to both men and women. While making efforts to improve the legal, judicial, social and economic system for women, stress will have to be placed on changing the mindset of men.

Moderated by Mr Rajan Navani, Managing Director, Jetline Group, the panelists included Mr Gurcharan Das, author and management guru, Ms Ranjana Kumari, Director of Center for Social Research, Ms Lakshmi Venkatesan, Founding Trustee and Executive Vice President of Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust, and Ms Madhu Bala Nath, Regional Advisor, UNIFEM South Asia.

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