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ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARS AND FELLOWS (ACSF - INDIA)
NEWSLETTER



ACSF BULLETIN



ACSF presents E-Newsletter - 'ACSF BULLETIN'
 for social, spiritual, scientific and technological development of India.

Beyond Rhetoric: Building a Truly Empowered India

Women empowerment and gender equality aren't mere buzzwords; they are the bedrock upon which a progressive and inclusive society is built. India's journey, marked by resilience and a commitment to change, has undoubtedly seen significant strides. Yet, as we celebrate Women's Day, we must acknowledge that the path to true equality remains fraught with challenges. Breaking down deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and ensuring equal opportunities for every woman is an ongoing, multifaceted process.

Empowerment, in its truest sense, is about enabling women to make independent choices, to seize control of their lives, and to actively participate in the social, economic, and political spheres. It is about nurturing self-worth, autonomy, and the ability to be agents of change. This foundation rests on essential pillars: a strong sense of self-worth, unfettered access to opportunities, and the power to dictate one's own destiny.

India has demonstrated its commitment through various initiatives. From the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign, aimed at promoting girl child education, to the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that provide financial independence, and the landmark Women's Reservation Act, 2023, designed to enhance political representation, the nation has taken significant steps. In India's ambitious vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, gender equality is not a peripheral concern; it is a central pillar. However, these initiatives must be more than symbolic gestures. They must translate into tangible, measurable outcomes.

This Women's Day, let us commit to moving beyond rhetoric and taking concrete actions. Let us pledge to dismantle the barriers that hold women back, to amplify their voices, and to create a society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive. Let us build an India where empowerment is not a privilege, but a fundamental right, ensuring a truly prosperous and equitable future for all.



India - United Kingdom Development Partnership

Advancing Global Sustainability and Climate Change Solutions

The UK and India have announced a co-funded package of research initiatives. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) India and the Government of India have been working together since 2023 to devise a jointly funded £19.4 million package. The package will fund research initiatives in:

- farmed animal diseases
- understanding geohazards
- innovation in sustainable materials, manufacturing and power electronics

Speaking at the ITC Maurya on 4 September 2024, British High Commissioner to India, Lindy Cameron welcomed the range of UKRI councils and Government of India departments engaged in these joint ventures.

She was joined by the secretaries of the three Government of India departments who have co-funded these projects: Professor Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DST). Dr Rajesh S Gokhale, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT) & Dr M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)



On this occasion, Lindy Cameron, British High Commissioner to India, said:

"From the discovery of graphene at the University of Manchester, to Homi J Bhabha discovering the laws of electron-positron scattering to furthering our understanding of nuclear physics, it is undeniable that research and innovation from the UK and India continues to benefit the world.

The breadth of these awards is a tribute to the nature of the UK-India partnership, addressing challenges ranging from understanding geohazards, tackling infectious diseases in farming, and transforming our industries for a sustainable future.

The UK and India are recognised globally as powerhouses for science and technology. When we bring the best minds from our countries together, we are truly capable of tackling the challenges of tomorrow."

Prime Minister announces relaunch of UK-India free trade talks

The Prime Minister has announced that UK-India trade talks will relaunch in the new year, following a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the G20 summit.

Boosting trade abroad is essential to delivering a strong economy at home. The UK is committed to negotiating a trade deal with India – one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

The UK will seek a new strategic partnership with India, including a trade agreement, as well as deepening co-operation in areas like security, education, technology, and climate change.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said:

- Boosting economic growth is key to improving living standards for working people.
- A new trade deal with India will support jobs and prosperity in the UK – and represent a step forward in our mission to deliver growth and opportunity across our country.

Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said:

- India is the fifth largest economy in the world and a vital trading partner for the UK. We believe there is a good deal to be done here that works for both nations.
- Whether it's lowering Indian tariffs to help British firms export to this dynamic market or boosting investment which already supports over 600,000 jobs across both countries, striking a deal is important to deliver this Government's core mission of driving economic growth.
- A deal with India would boost the UK's trading relationship, worth £42 billion in the 12 months to June 2024. UK exports to India are worth £16.6 billion.



The Commonwealth Scholarships Commission offers:

- Commonwealth Split-site Scholarships
- Commonwealth Master's Scholarships
- Commonwealth Shared Scholarships
- Commonwealth Distance learning Scholarships
- Commonwealth Professional Fellowships

For more information please visit :
<https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/scholarships>

Stories of 75 Commonwealth Alumni on 75 Years of Indian Independence

As a native of Darjeeling, nestled within snow-clad peaks of the Himalayas, Nilanjana Maulik grew and learned in an environment of courage, stamina, and surefootedness from the best of mountaineers. She is currently the Secretary General of Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (Calcutta Chapter) and a Master Trainer of Dementia Care Skills from Alzheimer's disease International, London. She also specialised in End of Life Care from Stanford University School of Medicine and is an International Master Practitioner of the Spark of Life Philosophy from Dementia Care International, Australia.



Dr. Nilanjana Maulik

Mauliks Extraordinary journey: the beginnings

Nilanjana Maulik grew up inspired by her grandmother, who nurtured her appreciation for various forms of human connection, interaction, and shared identity. This early influence sparked her interest in social sciences, leading her to pursue a Master's in Sociology and Social Anthropology, where she excelled academically, earning a gold medal from the University of North Bengal. Motivated by a desire to address issues in geriatric mental health, she later completed a graduate management degree in Human Services from the Heller School at Brandeis University in the USA. Supported by a Commonwealth Scholarship, she further obtained an MSc in Dementia Studies from the University of Stirling in the UK.

Commonwealth Experience

Nilanjana was the recipient of Commonwealth Master's Scholarship in the year 2014. Through this opportunity, she gained significant specialised knowledge during the course work and also absorbed diverse cultural perspectives on elder care. This experience was transformative, equipping her with the tools to approach dementia care with a holistic and inclusive methodology. The scholarship facilitated her participation in workshops and seminars, where she forged valuable connections with experts in geriatric care. Nilanjana was directly involved in the International Federation on Ageing and was a Board Member of the Commonwealth Association for the Ageing from 2014 to 2017.

Contributions to dementia care in India

With all her exposure and understanding of the world of dementia, Nilanjana applied her expertise to revolutionise dementia care practices in India. She was instrumental in establishing the first daycare center for persons living with dementia in Eastern India, addressing a significant gap in care facilities. There was little or no public recognition or funding of dementia services and Nilanjana undertook a systematic campaign to educate politicians and community leaders about the scale of the problem and the required response. She is effectively a one-woman show leading and managing ARDSI, Kolkata with a growing team of volunteers and staff, developing services for those with dementia and their families.

Nilanjana has a deep-seated commitment to giving back to her community, and she has selflessly dedicated many years to this cause. With extensive knowledge and experience in the field of dementia, she is driven by a genuine desire to share her insights and make a difference. Equipped with a background in social science, a management degree, and strong domain expertise, -

she possesses the ability to craft compelling narratives that resonate with a diverse audience—from clinicians to families navigating the journey of dementia.

The respect and support she has earned from prominent figures in the health, academic, and broader communities are a testament to her passion, dedication, sincerity, perseverance, and boundless energy. With a proven track record of bridging the gap between policy and practice, Nilanjana has devoted her career to enhancing dementia care through education, policy advocacy, and hands-on service initiatives.

Awards Galore!

Nilanjana Maulik has been recognised for her contributions to dementia care with multiple awards, including the prestigious 'Nari Tai Pari' award in 2023. She continues to inspire through her publications and active participation in global dementia care forums.

Message to the youth

Nilanjana advises the youth: "Discover a skill you enjoy and use it to make a positive impact in the world." She believes that today's young people are tomorrow's creators and caregivers. They need opportunities to understand and challenge the ageism and stereotypes that persist in society, learning to value individuals regardless of age, caste, or gender. Moreover, through their involvement, they would witness firsthand how their efforts contribute to the betterment of the community as a whole.

With dementia cases projected to rise significantly in India, Nilanjana calls on young adults and children to lead a movement to address this challenge. She urges them to raise awareness about the importance of maintaining a brain-healthy lifestyle, participate in advocacy efforts and take their concerns to Parliament, support fundraising initiatives, and provide companionship to peers who have a loved one with dementia at home.

She envisions this collective effort as the foundation for creating a 'Dementia-Friendly Generation'— and a future where empathy, awareness, and proactive engagement redefine how society supports individuals affected by dementia.

Empathy, awareness, and proactive engagement redefines how society supports patients with dementia.

Stories of 75 Commonwealth Alumni on 75 Years of Indian Independence

Prof. Rohmetra originally Professor of Management, is currently Dean Research Studies, at the University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India. Having an experience of over 35 years in teaching, research and academic administration, Prof. Rohmetra specialises in Human Resource Development, Organizational Behaviour and Cross-Cultural Management. Her current areas of interest are gender, indigenous studies, and leadership management. She served as the founding Director of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, an institution of national importance under aegis of Ministry of Education, GOI, for a term of 5 years. She is honoured with "First Ladies Award" for being the 'first Woman to head an (IIM) in the country. Among others, she is a recipient of various awards such as Career Award for Young Teachers below thirty-five years of age by AICTE (1999), best Teacher Award (2007) by the Association of Indian Management Schools (AIMS), Dewang Mehta Award (2009) for Excellence, Education Leadership Award (2013), IDA Leadership Award (2017) and the like.



Prof. Neelu Rohmetra

A Woman from 1980s

Prof. Rohmetra did B. Com in the year 1985 from 'Government Women College, Parade, Jammu' then a college of University of Jammu. With a brilliant academic record she received five Gold Medals till Graduation including Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Best Graduate Award of University of Jammu for the year 1985. Her professional voyage as a permanent faculty in University of Jammu began in 1989, when she embarked on her teaching career as a Lecturer at the same University she graduated from. Over the years, her dedication and scholarly pursuits led to her elevation to the esteemed position of Professor of Management Studies at the University of Jammu in March 2005.

From Jammu to the World

In 2001, Dr. Rohmetra was awarded the prestigious post-doctoral Commonwealth Visiting Fellowship by the Commonwealth Commission, UK, to work at Lancaster University in 'Training and Development' under Prof. Mark Eastern-by Smith. During this time, she adapted to new technologies, online systems, and cultural diversity, fostering a deep appreciation for inclusion. She also created her first email ID, which remains her primary email. During this time she began her association with the University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD), which she credits for much of her professional growth.

Earlier, in 1998, she was a visiting fellow at the EAP-European School of Management, Oxford, focusing on International Human Resource Management (IHRM). She emphasises the Commonwealth Fellowship's role (2001-02), in shaping her ability to engage internationally. It marked the start of her global journey and opened doors to endless possibilities.

Dr. Rohmetra also participated in key fellowships, including the International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) by the US State Department (2006), the Fulbright Administrators Seminar (2013), and the South Asian Skill Development Dialogue in London (2013). Most recently, she attended the International Teachers Programme (2019-21) Edition, at London Business School, UK. Her international exposure nurtured her respect for inclusion, diversity, and cross-cultural understanding.

"Despite women comprising nearly half the global population, only about 28% of managerial positions worldwide are held by women"

Never say no to hard work

On account of her outstanding contributions and impressive academic achievements, Prof. Rohmetra was appointed as the Director of IIM Sirmaur by the Union Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, in February 2017. This appointment marked her as the Founding Director of IIM Sirmaur, where she started with minimal infrastructure and staff and built it into a premier institute with an international outlook and layout. While planning buildings and facilities for the permanent campus, Dr. Rohmetra used her international exposure to universities like Lancaster University, drawing motivation from their inclusive design. She ensured the creation of numerous discussion spaces and lounges outside classrooms in the plans at IIM Sirmaur, to foster peer learning and community engagement. She believes every corner should inspire interaction and creativity, as most learning happens outside classrooms, helping students transform into future leaders.

Before assuming her role as Founding Director at IIM Sirmaur, Prof. Rohmetra held key positions at the University of Jammu, including Rector of Kathua and Billawar Campuses, Director of the Business School, and Founding Director of ICCCR & HRM. After completing her five-year term at IIM Sirmaur in March 2022, she returned to her parent institution, the University of Jammu. She was assigned the role of Director of Distance and Online Education in June 2022, which she enthusiastically performed before becoming Dean Research Studies, for the University in October 2023. Her illustrious career reflects her dedication to education and academic leadership.

Was it easy for her?

A woman who got married early, raising a year old child (her daughter) while teaching and having a second child (her son) while pursuing Ph.D seems unbelievable to many of us but she did, and with full determination. Facing various challenges, her persistence and hard work ultimately broadened her perspective to life. A woman who is grandmother today, believes, "never giving up is the key to her success, even when we think everything is collapsing. Nothing falls apart, just need to evolve with conviction. Indeed, the situation for women today has improved, but there is still a lack of support & inhibitions still exist, for which we all can work together to overcome for blissful present and happy future".

A woman who gathered courage and managed her guilt to put her one year old daughter in a nursery back in 1980s in Jammu, J&K, to perform her duty as lecturer, says you can do it too!

Stories of 75 Commonwealth Alumni on 75 Years of Indian Independence

Professor M. Muruganant (Ananth), a Cambridge doctorate and recipient of Commonwealth and DAAD fellowships, is a distinguished academic leader & Founder of the Academic Network (acadnet.net & acadnews.com). He has served as Vice-Chancellor at prestigious Universities in India. As an advisor to India's Principal Scientific Advisor & founder of the Global Education Forum, he drives educational transformation and sustainability. A prominent voice on AI and education, he has established research centers, and pioneered materials property prediction, influencing major corporations. His journey from the quiet township of Kalpakkam to the world's most prestigious institutions is a testament to perseverance, intellectual curiosity, and an unwavering commitment to education and research.



Prof. M. Muruganant

Humble Beginnings: The Spark of Curiosity

Growing up in Kalpakkam, a township built for professionals working at a nuclear power plant, young Ananth was surrounded by science and technology. This environment instilled in him a deep fascination for research and innovation. His early exposure to scientific discussions shaped his academic and professional pursuits. His father played a pivotal role in shaping his future. It was he who discovered the Commonwealth Fellowship and encouraged Ananth to apply, firmly believing in his potential. This single step set the stage for an extraordinary academic journey that would take Ananth across continents and position him among the finest minds in materials science.

A Scholar at Cambridge: Breaking New Ground

Professor Muruganant's selection as a Commonwealth Fellow opened the doors to the prestigious University of Cambridge, where he pursued his doctoral research from 1999 to 2002. It was a transformative period marked by intellectual growth and groundbreaking research. Under the mentorship of Sir Professor H. K. D. H. Bhadeshia, a renowned figure in physical metallurgy, delved into the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) with materials science. At a time when AI was still in its early applications, he was pioneering its use in alloy development. His research focused on predicting material properties using AI and thermodynamic simulations, reducing the need for extensive physical testing. This innovation not only accelerated the development of new steel alloys but also minimised material wastage and energy consumption—contributions that would prove invaluable to industrial applications. His work on welding applications in sub-zero temperatures addressed a crucial need for industries operating in extreme conditions.

His time at Cambridge was not just about academic excellence but also about developing resilience and adaptability. The challenges of research, setbacks in experimentation, and the constant push for innovation shaped him into a scientist who was not only technically adept but also determined and resourceful.

Expanding Horizons: Postdoctoral Research and Global Recognition

Upon completing PhD in 2002, Prof. Muruganant embarked on a postdoctoral journey that took him to Oak Ridge National Laboratory as an ORAU Fellow. Collaborating with eminent scientists such as Prof. Suresh Babu, Dr. Stan David, and Dr. T. Debroy, he continued his research on advanced materials. His contributions in the field gained recognition beyond academia leading to an invitation to the NRI Talent Search Program from the President of India's office. His expertise also found applications in Australia, where he played a significant role in research initiatives for the Energy Pipeline CRC and Rail CRC.

He was soon appointed as the youngest Chair Professor by the Ministry of Steel and Mines, Government of India.

Transforming Education: Leadership in Academia and AI Integration

Professor Muruganant's leadership extended beyond research, serving as Vice-Chancellor at two Universities, including Adani University and shaping its long-term vision. He established the Academic Network (acadnet.net) and acadnews.com to connect academia with real-world applications. His Global Education Forum, in collaboration with UNESCO and the UN, fosters dialogue on educational transformation and sustainability, ensuring institutions remain innovative and globally relevant.

He has integrated sustainability into academia and research, shaping FIMPART into a global hub for sustainable materials, recognised by Springer for advancing SDG 7. As an advisor to India's Principal Scientific Advisor, he drives innovation and policy. A sought-after speaker, he champions AI's responsible use in education and research.

Mentorship and Global Collaboration: Shaping the Next Generation

Beyond his personal achievements, Professor Muruganant is deeply committed to mentoring young researchers. He believes that focus, resilience, and strong ethical standards are the cornerstones of success. Encouraging students to embrace curiosity, he has facilitated numerous research opportunities for young scholars in the UK, ensuring they gain international exposure and experience. Many of his mentees have gone on to prestigious institutions, contributing to cutting-edge research in their respective fields. Through these collaborations, Ananth is not only shaping individual careers but also fostering a global network of researchers dedicated to innovation and sustainability.

A Legacy of Innovation and Impact

Professor M. Muruganant's journey is one of relentless pursuit of knowledge, innovation, and transformative leadership. From a young boy in Kalpakkam to a globally recognised academic and researcher, his story is an inspiration to aspiring scientists and educators worldwide. Through his pioneering work in materials science, leadership in academic institutions, and contributions to global education and sustainability, Ananth has left an indelible mark on the world. His legacy is not only in the innovations he has brought forth but in the generations of students and researchers he continues to inspire. As he forges ahead, one thing remains clear—Professor M. Muruganant is not just shaping the future of education and research; he is building a world where knowledge, collaboration, and sustainability drive meaningful change.

THE CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM: A BEGGAR-THY-NEIGHBOR POLICY IN DISGUISE?

By - Ms. Falguni Lalwani

As climate change indicators break records, the steps taken to a sustainable future demands urgency and developing countries are the critical part of this transformation. However, mechanisms such as the carbon border adjustment mechanism by the European Union, as a case in point taken in this essay, analyse how it negatively affects the exports of the Global South countries and majorly argues that Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is a perfect case of a Zero-Sum Game which is a very anathema to tackle climate crisis which does not know any geographical boundaries.

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is the critical instrument for the EU to achieve its European Green Deal objectives and meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets enshrined in the European Climate Law. Under CBAM, businesses importing certain emission-intensive goods in the EU must pay a levy based on the embedded GHG emissions.

The EU's CBAM is based on the following two principles - 1) Pricing domestic CO₂ emissions based on a production-based scheme, using a carbon price levied on its productive sectors proportional to direct CO₂ emissions, and 2) the application of additional prices on imported products as per the consumption-based scheme so to avoid carbon leakage and the shift of production to countries who do have environmental regulation.

A Comparative Analysis of Sustainability-Linked Tax Policies in Global South

Sustainability-linked programs are in the nascent stage in BRICS+ Nations. The Brazilian government currently makes carbon taxes and ETS, with no set date for new rules as per the EY Green Tax Tracker Preview. Further, a new "selective tax" has been proposed that will be imposed on producing, marketing, or importing goods and services deemed harmful to the health and the environment.

Under the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022, the government of India notified the 'Carbon Trading Scheme' on 28 June 2023. This scheme aims to reduce, move, or avoid GHG emissions by trading carbon credit certificates. Further, measures comprise productivity linked incentives to boost the domestic manufacturing capabilities of the automobile industry, including electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

While in China, there are three national environmental protection focus areas: pollution reduction, greenhouse gas reduction, and resource conservation. Various tax incentives address the three focus areas and use distinct mechanisms, including reduced corporate income tax rates for certain enterprises or specific revenue sources, increased VAT refunds, or tax exemptions.

South Africa enacted a carbon tax in 2019. The South African carbon regime applies an in-country cost to industrial greenhouse gas emissions. The current carbon regime is expected to be reviewed. Most, if not all, existing allowances may be removed, drastically increasing this tax (allowances currently mandate up to a 95% reduction).

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: Implications for Global Trade for Global South

Theoretically, CBAM is regarded as effective in reducing carbon leakage and negatively affecting competitiveness due to unilateral -

climate policies. Suppose such competitiveness effects turn out to be significant. In that case, where the CBAM may, in turn, shift the burden of climate policy from the developed regions, that is, the EU, to trading partners in the developing world, and such a result is a violation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities. The impact assessment calculations made by the EU (EU-Commission, 2021) suggest that the effect of CBAM on European GDP remains minimal (around 0.2% decrease by 2030). The CBAM has a double effect on production by sector.

The most significant effect is recorded in trade flows with a substantial drop in imports and exports, a 10% average in the covered sectors. The overall impact of CBAM depends on the size of exports covered by the mechanism as a share of total exports to the EU. A 2022 study presented that even if countries such as Russia, China, Turkey, and Ukraine are considered those most affected by the CBAM when their trade volume is taken into account, the mechanism's relative effect will be significant for other countries.

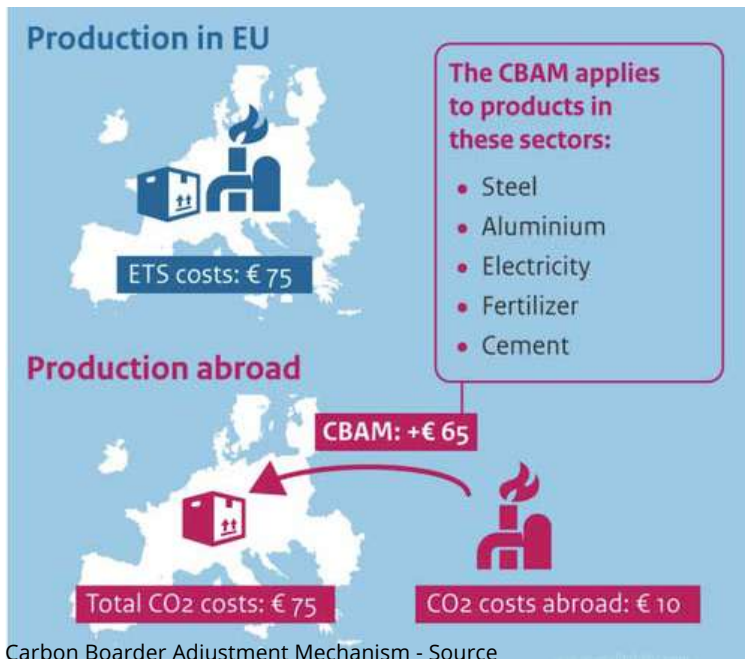
Mozambique is by far the most affected country in relative terms, as almost 20 percent of its total exports are products in coverage of CBAM- or rather, to a significant degree, a single good: aluminium. As per this measure, the countries most affected by CBAM are Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Moldova, and Albania, which constitute either low-income African countries or developing EU neighbours. Further, Russia and Turkey ranked first and third in total CBAM exports but dropped to fourteenth and thirteenth place in terms of the share of CBAM goods in total exports to the EU.

The developing countries' above vulnerabilities, as underpinned in data, arise from three interrelated factors: Rise in population growth and income increases; these countries have a consistent rise in energy demand, which needs to be met by investments in energy and carbon-intensive energy systems. Second, these nations lack the technical and financial resources to create a sustainable and clean energy system in the long run. Lastly, the decarbonization process of energy-intensive industries is costly and complex, requiring consistent policies implemented over the long run and a support structure of subsidies and investments. Moreover, high-income economies that will gain a comparative advantage due to CBAM will increase their exports to the EU. Thereby, a possibility exists of creating a "Climate Club" of developed nations trading with each other, which may lead to a rise in global inequality among nations.

Conclusion

The CBAM function is to disincentivise firms to outsource their carbon emissions and promote a more generalised low-carbon transition, disproportionately affecting some non-EU economies. Further, all the affected countries in the developing world have a low capacity to adapt their productive structure to shift to a less-emitting industry or to be able to adopt low-emission cutting-edge technologies; price stimulus such as the CBAM may be less effective in the promotion of reduction in emissions in these economies.

The question of equity and common but differentiated responsibility demands that developed economies invest in and be responsible for developing and disseminating the technologies required to transform energy-intensive industries. Carbon tariffs theoretically shift the economic burden of the developed world's climate policies to the developing world.



Carbon Boarder Adjustment Mechanism - Source

The financing required to meet adaptation and mitigation goals is calculated at trillions of US dollars annually until 2050. However, only around 630 billion dollars a year in climate finance is spread worldwide. However, only a fraction of it goes to developing economies. Middle- and low-income economies are expected to account for 66 percent of global CO2 emissions by 2030, a rise from 44 percent in 1990.

These statistics underpin the need for a coordinated approach to the climate crisis but in reality as Elizabeth Sidiropoulos of the South African Institute of International Affairs states, "Europe is always perceived to give with the one hand and take with the other, often more than it gives." CBAM is just another case in point as large economies like India, where the latest economic survey deemed CBAM as "went against the spirit of the Paris Agreement," and such stances do present the stance of the Global South.

Disclaimer: Views/opinions are author's personal.



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EMPOWERING WOMEN: A CALL FOR EQUALITY, EDUCATION, AND CHANGE

By - Dr. Lata Suresh

Women's empowerment is a crucial step toward building a just, progressive, and prosperous society. When women are empowered, communities thrive, economies grow, and the world becomes a more inclusive and harmonious place. Therefore, women's empowerment must be emphasised on the equality, education, safety, respect, breaking stereotypes, and social action.

Equality - Bridging the Gap: According to the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, 68.4% of the global gender gap has been closed, with countries like Iceland, Finland, and Norway leading the way. More companies are implementing policies to promote gender pay equity and support women in leadership roles.

Education - The Key to Independence: Education is one of the most powerful tools for empowering women. An educated woman can make informed decisions, pursue a career of her choice, and contribute to economic growth.

Over the past two decades, global female literacy rates have risen significantly. According to UNESCO, the global female literacy rate reached 83% in 2022. In countries like India, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative has contributed to increased female enrollment in schools, ensuring girls receive quality education.

Safety - A Fundamental Right: Women should live without fear of violence, harassment, or discrimination. Ensuring women's safety means enforcing strict laws against crimes like domestic violence, human trafficking, and workplace harassment. Many countries have strengthened their legal frameworks to protect women. For instance, the #MeToo movement led to stronger policies against workplace harassment globally, and India's Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, introduced stricter punishments for sexual crimes. Women's safety apps, such as bSafe and Safetipin, provide additional security measures for women worldwide.

Respect - Recognising Women's Worth: Women's choices, dreams, and ambitions should be respected. From household responsibilities to corporate boardrooms, women contribute significantly to every aspect of life. Their efforts should be recognised and appreciated. The representation of women in leadership positions has increased, with women now holding approximately 32% of senior management positions globally (Grant Thornton's 2023 Women in Business report). Leaders like Kamala Harris, the first female Vice President of the United States, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first female Director-General of the World Trade Organization, exemplify how women are breaking barriers and achieving new heights.

Breaking Stereotypes - Redefining Roles: For too long, women have been confined by outdated stereotypes that dictate what they can or cannot do. Women can be scientists, entrepreneurs, leaders, and pioneers in every field. These limitations must be challenged, and society should celebrate women who break barriers and redefine success on their terms. In STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), women like Gitanjali Rao, a young scientist and inventor, and Kalpana Chawla, the first woman of Indian origin in space, serve as role models for the next generation.

Social Action - Leadership and Grassroots Change: Women must be encouraged to take on leadership roles in politics, business, and other fields. However, change must begin at the grassroots level. Communities should support women's rights, mentor young girls, and promote female leadership in local governance and organisations. The rise of female leaders in global politics, such as New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern and Germany's Angela Merkel, demonstrates how women in leadership can drive positive change. In grassroots movements, initiatives like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India empower women economically by providing financial independence and business training.

Conclusion: Empowering women is not just about improving the lives of women; it is about transforming society as a whole. By advocating for equality, education, safety, respect, and social change, we can build a world where every woman has the opportunity to reach her full potential. It is time to move beyond words and take action—because when women rise, we all rise.

Disclaimer: Views/opinions are author's personal.



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EXHIBITION - CELEBRATING 65 YEARS OF COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission celebrated 65 years of delivering Commonwealth Scholarships in 2024. An exhibition showcasing this theme was held from 15 November- 31 December 2024 in the Gallery, British Council, New Delhi.

The objectives were to celebrate and showcase the achievements of the CSC and/or Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni in India, to promote the value of CSC in-country networks and relationships to achieving sustainable development, to strengthen the CSC's advocacy base and raise awareness of Commonwealth Scholarships at a national level.

Exhibition highlights included display of an overview of Commonwealth Scholarships in India through infographics, testimonials- 65 Achievers (wall of fame), CSC impact stories from India and insight into careers and specific projects undertaken by alumni in India.



Youth Champions from Action on Ability Development and Inclusion (AADII) shared their experience with the audience. The event was attended by 95 guests, including Commonwealth and Chevening alumni, ABS members (Association of British Scholars) and guest from the Action on Ability Development and Inclusion (AADII).



HYBRID PRE-DEPARTURE BRIEFING SESSION, INDIA/MALDIVES/FIJI

The British Council in India on behalf of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission organised hybrid pre - departure briefing for Commonwealth scholars from India, Maldives and Fiji on 23 August 2024. The hybrid meeting was attended by 43 scholars and 9 Commonwealth alumni also joined to share their experience of studying and living in UK.

All the scholars were congratulated on winning the prestigious scholarships. A brief overview of Commonwealth Scholarships Commission, information about the wide CSC alumni network and brief about the Association of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows (ACSF) in India was provided. Pre-departure information/PPT was shared with the group along with relevant links to refer.



CHEVENING AND COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIPS COMMISSION CELEBRATES WORLD DISABILITY DAY

The British Council in India on behalf of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission along with Chevening team celebrated World Disability Day on 3 December 2024 at the British Council.

Panel Discussion on "Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future – possibilities, opportunities and hope" was organised followed by networking reception.

The event started with a welcome note by Michael Houlgate, Deputy Director, British Council India. The session was moderated by Natalia Leigh, Head of Political & Bilateral Affairs, British High Commission, New Delhi.

Experts and alumni invited for the panel discussion included Praveen Kumar Gurunath, Global Lead Advisor - Social Inclusion, VSO international, Syamala Gudugu, Head of Action, Action on Ability Development and Inclusion, Dipender Manocha, Founder Trustee, Saksham Trust, Soni Singh, Partner, VGA Legal , Rica Roy, Consultant Editor of NDTV 24x7 and Prof. Dr Adarsh Kumar, Professor, Forensic Medicine & Toxicology & In-charge Chairman Disability Medical Board & Trauma Center, AIIMS, New Delhi.

Recent Scholars - 2024 - "A window to the Future"



Dhiksha Mohan is a thought leader for Biomimicry in India and first graduate from her family in Coimbatore. She is the founder of 1.618 - a nature inspired community and collective for design and education. She has been a public speaker, science communicator on nature Inspiration, sustainability, and regenerative and circular practices. She is intrigued by leaves, fractal geometries and insects.

Currently she is a Commonwealth Master's scholar at UCL to pursue her MSc in Nature Inspired Solutions. She is strongly focusing on sustainable energy storage innovation for addressing India's energy challenge. Her background in electrical engineering, industrial experience in nanotechnology, fellowship in Ananta Aspen and multiple internships has aided this. She is also a socially conscious photographer, community service worker, Bharathanatyam dancer and recycled doodle artist which helps her interweave her passion and purpose.

She has 5 publications, launched 40+ events including E-GRID - India's first student-led conclave to bridge industry and academia in Electric Vehicles.



Roop Kunwar Singh is a public policy professional with a Bachelor's in Commerce from Shri Ram College of Commerce and a Master's in Public Policy from the University of Oxford. He was a recipient of the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship for the latter between 2023-24.

He is currently working with the William J. Clinton Foundation in Delhi to strengthen care and treatment for Type 1 Diabetes within the public health system. His focus during his master's was health policy, cyber governance and building cultures of integrity within the public settings. He analysed the current reach and utilisation of Government of India's flagship telemedicine network-eSanjeevani- among the rural population of the country. Based on this analysis, he devised a roadmap for integrating the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) and the National Program for Control and Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD) to ensure equitable coverage for the rural population.

Prior to his Master's, Roop had worked with Teach For India on providing quality education to marginalised communities and with the Haryana State Government on optimising the delivery of public services. Elimination of multi-dimensional poverty from India through universal access to quality education, healthcare and essential services is the guiding goal that Roop wants to build his career around.



Dharitri is a PhD scholar at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. Her PhD focuses on elucidating the cell signaling mechanisms employed by gut pathogens, with a particular emphasis on human Enteropathogenic Escherichia Coli (EPEC), the causative agent of infantile diarrhea and a major contributor to morbidity in developing countries like India.

Notably, existing research on EPEC has relied on laboratory strains isolated from Western countries, leaving a significant knowledge gap regarding strains from developing countries, such as India. As a Commonwealth Split-site scholar at Imperial College London, Dharitri aims to bridge this gap by characterising three clinical isolates of EPEC obtained from Indian diarrhea patients. Her research seeks to understand the pathogenesis mechanisms of these isolates and compare them to the reference EPEC strain.

By deciphering the molecular mechanisms underlying EPEC pathogenesis, Dharitri's research holds significant clinical relevance, particularly in India, where it may inform the design of novel therapeutics against these pathogens.



Vaani has traversed the fields of training and development as well as media and publishing, only to find her true calling in the education sector during the Teach for India fellowship. Vaani's journey as a TFI Delhi Fellow in the volatile community of Jahangirpuri exposed her to the harsh realities of conflict-induced tensions.

During the 2022 communal clashes, she witnessed the unpreparedness of educational institutions and the vital role played by voluntary organisations in conflict response. This experience inspired her Project 'Hug Your Heart', prioritises theatre-based socio-emotional learning (SEL) as a means of catharsis among the students. Vaani also holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Inclusive Education from Azim Premji University. At present, she is pursuing an MA in Comparative Education at University College London through the Commonwealth Master's Scholarship. Alongside, she is fulfilling the responsibilities of a Course Representative at the Institute of Education and Indian Society Lead at Goodenough College.

Her research interests include but are not limited to the interrelation between socio-cultural values and national education systems across the world. Upon returning home, armed with the knowledge gained, skills refined and international networks established, Vaani's mission is clear. She aspires to drive tangible change in India's education landscape by empowering educators and students, ensuring the provision and promotion of educational access, inclusion, and opportunities.



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