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Confederation of
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NEPAL INFRASTRUCTURE SUMMIT 2024

Parallel Session 6:

Creating Opportunities for Women in the Infrastructure Space

co-hosted by the Yunus Center, Asian Institute of Technology
Energy Development, Services, Management & Technology Program



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Creating Opportunities for Women in the Infrastructure Space

Women professionals are

- graduating in near-equal numbers with technical degrees
- qualifying for technical jobs competitively
- having to drop out of careers because of family priorities

WHY? Because they are trapped in careers designed for men

This panel looks at examples of how this can be changed for the better

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KAVITHA KASYNATHAN
*Head of Development for the Australian
Embassy in Nepal*

Kavitha Kasynathan serves as Head of Development for the Australian Embassy in Nepal.

A development professional, Kavitha started her career with Oxfam Australia in Sri Lanka and later joined the Australian Agency for International Development (now the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) in 2007.

She has led and managed the Australian Government's aid investments in the Middle East, Africa, Pacific and South Asia in multiple fields, including humanitarian, community development and human development (health/education).

Kavitha was posted to Afghanistan and has worked in West Africa (Ghana), Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea.

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MR. NIRVANA CHAUDHARY
*Vice President, Confederation of Nepalese
Industries (CNI)*

Mr. Chaudhary is the Vice President of the Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) and the Managing Director of Chaudhary Group, one of Nepal's leading conglomerates. With over two decades of experience in business management, he plays a pivotal role in the overall growth and strategic direction of the group.

A philanthropist, entrepreneur, and former national squash player, Chaudhary is also involved in numerous global initiatives. He serves as a member of the high-level steering committee of the United Nations Global Compact and the Forum of Young Global Leaders. His philanthropic efforts extend through the Chaudhary Foundation, where he is the Vice Chairman.

In addition to his business and philanthropic activities, Chaudhary has an academic background with executive education from Harvard University, London Business School, and MIT. He has held various honorary roles, including Honorary Consul of Serbia and the Maldives, and is an avid supporter of sustainable development, youth entrepreneurship, and public-private partnerships.

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Prof. MINI S. THOMAS
Dean, Faculty of Engineering & Technology, JMI, India
Former Director, NIT Tiruchirappalli
Past President, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute
(SICI)



Prof. Mini Shaji Thomas, is currently the Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Technology, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), and was the Director of National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli (NIT, Trichy) from 2016-2021, the top NIT as per the India Rankings by NIRF for 6 consecutive years. Dr. Thomas is on the Board of Directors of the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) and was the President of Shastri-Indo Canadian Institute (SICI) 2020-21, a binational organization supported by MoE, GoI, that promotes understanding between India and Canada.

She was the founder Director of the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) at JMI, has set up the first of its kind SCADA laboratory and Substation Automation (SA) Laboratory at JMI, and started a unique M Tech program in JMI, in Electrical Power System Management. She was the board member of 3 IEEE International Boards, has traveled extensively around the globe, and delivered lectures in prestigious universities.

She won the IEEE EAB Meritorious Service in Continuing Education “for design and development of curriculum and laboratory facilities for professionals and students in the electric power utility industry” and many other awards.

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Prof. PAULA BANERJEE
Professor, IDRC Endowed Research Chair,
Gender & Development Studies
Director, Center on Gender and Forced
Displacement
Asian Institute of Technology

Professor Paula Banerjee has a long research and publication record on gender and forced displacement in both South and Southeast Asia, and serves as the IDRC Endowed Chair in Gender & Development at AIT since April 2023.

She has served as Vice Chancellor of Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata, between 2017 and 2019.

Before that she was Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calcutta, responsible for approximately 7000 graduate students, 32 departments and 10 research centers. A world-class leader in gender and forced displacement, Professor Banerjee has served as a two-term president of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM).

She is the author of 15 books, and over 44 articles and book chapters, and numerous conference papers and reports. She is the editor of Refugee Watch and on the editorial boards of several other journals.

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MS. USHA KHATIWADA
Objective Lead, USAID Urja Nepal Program

Ms. Usha Khatiwada is the Objective Lead for the USAID-funded Urja Project, which focuses on advancing Nepal's energy sector. As a former CEO of NRN Infrastructure & Development Limited, she was instrumental in securing investments for major hydropower projects, underscoring her expertise in strategic management and fund management. With over 17 years of experience, Usha is a prominent advocate for creating opportunities for women in the infrastructure space.

She actively mentors through initiatives like the Women in Hydropower Mentorship Program and Global WomenTech, fostering the next generation of female leaders.

Her commitment to female empowerment and infrastructure development has earned her prestigious accolades, including the World-Changing Women Award (2020), the 50 Leading Lights of Asia Pacific Award (2021), and the Women with Hydro Vision Award (2023).

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SHIVANI MANAKTALA

Director, Palladium

*Team Leader, South Asia Regional Infrastructure
Connectivity (SARIC)*

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Shivani is a Director at Palladium and is presently the Team Leader on the SARIC, Training and Networking services program. SARIC or South Asia Regional Infrastructure Connectivity is an initiative funded by the Australian Government which supports the overall goal to deepen economic linkages and support regional prosperity and inclusive growth and is implemented by the World Bank, IFC and Palladium across the 7 South Asian countries.

Shivani previously led the Agriculture vertical at Palladium and has worked in the impact sector across Asia, Africa and Latin America where she has worked in livelihoods, agriculture, energy and the affordable housing sectors.

Her experience includes working with international not for profits, social enterprises, businesses and government such as IDE, Ashoka, Envirofit, Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation amongst others

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Prof. FAIZ SHAH

Professor, AIU Center of Excellence for
Socio-Economic Development & Innovation
Executive Director, Yunus Center AIT
President, Yunus Foundation Thailand



Yunus
Center
AIT

Professor Faiz Shah is Executive Director of Yunus Center AIT (YCA) and member of the AIT Management team. In 2023, he received an appointment as Professor at the Albukhary Center of Excellence for Socio-Economic Development & Innovation.

As a member of the WePOWER Steering Committee, Professor Shah facilitates the HRM Working Group, and has led the design and implementation of the SAR100. In a 40-year international career as educator, entrepreneur and development professional, Professor Shah has overseen over 300 projects and trained over 3,000 grassroots changemakers.

He is lead author of “Responsible Business Guide – A Toolkit for Winning Companies” (CIPE-RBI-ACCA, 2010), and has recently contributed book chapters and papers on enterprise-led development (OUP, 2024), social impact business design (Springer, 2023), and mobile health (Springer, 2022).

In 2019 he published the authorized Urdu edition of Professor Yunus’ “A World of Three Zeroes: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions” AIT Press, 2020).

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