

Hiring women makes good business sense: NCW chief

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Lalitha Kumaramangalam, the chairperson of the National Commission for Women, has emphasized that 'inclusiveness pays', and added that the hiring of women has usually led to increased productivity and profits and it makes good business sense to invest in women.

Addressing a session on Inclusion and Gender: Building India, as part of CII's National Conference and Annual Session 2015, Kumaramangalam also felt that women need training and capacity building to be part of the financial inclusion process and there is an urgent need to focus on women working in the agriculture sector and the Non-timber Forest Product (NTFP) where 90 percent of the workforce constitutes women. Investments in the form of skills development and R and D of women friendly machineries and equipment would be critical.

She felt that they are multi-taskers and manage well, however they need mentoring from senior colleagues, particularly women.

Rajive Kaul, Past President, CII and Chairman NICCO Corporation, said that while women account for almost 48 percent of the population, participation of women in the labour force, politics and also the corporate sector has been meagre.

While in some fields such as banking and financial services, women have done exceedingly well, on the whole the situation is not very good. Less than 2 percent of BSE 500 companies have female CEOs. This year, 180 companies that are listed on the National Stock Exchange (NSE), have failed to comply with the rule of having one woman director as required by the Companies Act.

He also shared that persons with special abilities constitute a significant 2.2 percent of the country's population, however, their employment needs remain largely unmet and there is a skill gap of nearly 10 million. Further regarding the historically most disadvantaged group, the SC and ST, access to capital continues to be a challenge. Some of the key elements which would provide a stimulus in building an inclusive and productive society are quality education and access to health services, skills development and provision of social and physical infrastructure that enable participation of all.

Pramod Bhasin, Chairman, The Skills Academy and Founder and Non-Executive Vice Chairman, Genpact shared how the female workforce which comprises around 40 percent of the total workforce at entry level, shrinks the higher they go with mere four percent staying at the senior level.

Pallavi Shroff, Senior Partner, Amarchand and Mangaldas, felt that while things have moved ahead in terms of women empowerment, challenges remained not in hiring but retaining the

women workforce and felt that providing an eco-system that ensures safety is one of prime factors to retain women at the workplace.

Dr Ganesh Natarajan, Vice Chairman and CEO, Zensar Technologies, shared his own experience of initiating a 'women for Excellence' programme in his organization that led to a significant increase in the number of women occupying senior management positions. Dr Natarajan suggested that CSR funds may be used for training the marginalized and create a large skills base that can contribute to the country's development process.

The panelists shared some of the good practices followed by them to encourage and build an eco-system that welcome women. These included providing technology support, training and mentorship programmes for women, gender sensitization workshops for men, offering flexible timing and benefits like setting up daycare centres for their children.

Government efforts focusing on inclusion like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Swachh Vidyalaya Programme, skills development and especially the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) which is working towards enabling all to use IT and related applications and participate actively in the democratic process, were much appreciated.