

## Work4Progress India Annual Workshop held in New Delhi

The Work4Progress (W4P) India Annual Workshop was held at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi on the 25 November, 2022. The event aims at providing a platform for experts in the varying fields related to entrepreneurship to deliberate, discuss, and share their insights on the current state of entrepreneurship in India. It was organised by Development Alternatives (DA) along with network partners Transforming Rural India Foundation (TRIF), Rang De, and Work4Progress India Platform partner ActionAid Association (AAA).

The event commenced with an opening address by HRH the Infanta Cristina of Spain, where she noted the progress made by the Work4Progress India programme. Launched in 2016, the programme has made impactful strides in expanding and is now active in 3 countries, showcasing the viability of the methods that have been extensively developed over time, with flexibility to adapt to different contexts.

DA and AAA in their ensuing presentations called attention to the importance of listening as an imperative to engage and encourage communities to foster their agencies. Only through this stage can any semblance of co-creation begin, and this is the cornerstone of the Work4Progress programme, which has gone on to create systemic enterprise prototypes in collaboration with these communities, for the strive towards inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship



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The first thematic session, titled “Access to Credit for Inclusive Entrepreneurship”, hosted by social investing platform Rang De, addressed the issues of accessibility to finance. With the success of peer-to-peer lending programmes, the discussion carried on in this vein, with suggestions, strong endorsement, and advocacy for peer-to-peer lending, which would make it easier for people to access credit. It would enable individuals to obtain loans directly from other individuals, cutting out the institutional middlemen. Moreover, it would allow these loans to be personalised and tailored according to the receiver’s requirements and specificities. This would be breaking new boundaries in India, where the chronic problem of accessibility to credit has hampered people from pursuing their entrepreneurial venture.

The importance of solidarities was also talked about in the panel titled “Mainstreaming Entrepreneurship through Institutional Engagement and Ecosystem of Growth” which was hosted by TRIF. Having an ecosystem that is inclusive was noted as crucial in building entrepreneurship and creating complete value-chains that would make rural India completely self-sufficient. Taking this opportunity, Shri Karma Zimpa Bhutia, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, spoke on the presence of RSETIs across 575 districts of the country, and extended an invitation to stakeholders to collaborate with the government in building an inclusive ecosystem for entrepreneurship.

Similarly, the gendered aspect of entrepreneurship, and more, was touched upon extensively by the panel in the roundtable moderated by AAA titled “Feminist Solidarity Economies for Social Transformation”. The many barriers that women face in pursuing entrepreneurship was talked about, and the importance of solidarity, having a community, and a safe space for them is crucial, whether it be through Self Help Groups, or Cooperatives, as the various panel members showcased through their discussions.

In the final roundtable of the day moderated by DA titled, “#SAMUDYAM - Unlocking Entrepreneurship for Job Creation”, it was noted that in India’s history, the country is at a point where it has the highest percentage of working population, meaning a strong demographic dividend. It was stressed that there is a need to ask the right questions with regards to age, caste, income, and domicile to understand the social positioning of people, the barriers they face, and include many more under the purviews of entrepreneurship.

For the closing remarks, Professor Shambhu Prasad, IRMA, Work4Progress India’s Impact Evaluation partner highlighted three key findings from the programme: First, that the contribution of family support in an entrepreneur’s life is underrated. Second, one of the biggest roadblocks in pursuing entrepreneurship is that of a lack of a support system. Most of these cases invariably involve women, who are under the constraints of a patriarchal society, which is why brave spaces and these types of systemic prototypes are pivotal in fostering entrepreneurial aspirants. Moreover, he spoke about the diversification in the enterprises and the presence of local mentors in the existing ecosystems that have impacted the culture of entrepreneurship. Although he noted that a lot of progress has been made, one should not rest on our laurels, but strive to achieve more.

The workshop witnessed an attendance of over 150 participants which included entrepreneurs from the programme, representatives from various government departments, financial institutions, skill development agencies, research organisations, and universities. Through deliberations at the Annual Workshop, the attendees were able to gain diverse perspectives on the subject of unlocking critical flows for accelerating entrepreneurship and empowering communities through dignified employment opportunities.