LAKSHMAN KADIRGAMAR INSTITUTE
OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

SPOTLIGHTS

LKI's *Spotlights* feature interviews with global thought leaders on aspects of contemporary international relations.

Gender & Development with Caren Grown

Interviewed by Divya Hundlani*

March 2018

* **Divya Hundlani** is a Research Associate at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKI). The opinions expressed in this transcript are the interviewee's own views and are not the institutional views of LKI.

The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute (LKI) recently interviewed Caren Grown, Senior Director, Gender, at the World Bank Group, to discuss the global gender gap, how it might be closed, and what developmental benefits that would bring. This interview is part of the LKI Spotlight series, which features interviews with thought leaders around the world, on current and emerging issues of international relations.

Dr. Grown is an internationally recognised expert on gender issues in development. Before joining the World Bank in 2014, she was Economist-in-Residence and Co-Director of the Program on Gender Analysis in Economics at the American University. In 2015, Dr. Grown led the consultations that resulted in the World Bank's new gender strategy for 2016 to 2023 titled 'Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction, and Inclusive Growth.'

See below for a lightly edited transcript of the interview, featuring Dr. Grown's responses to questions posed by Divya Hundlani, Research Associate at LKI.

LKI: Gender equality is important to the World Bank Group's goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting sustainable development. *How significant is the current gender gap in Asia; economically, politically, and otherwise? Has Asia's economic rise done much to close it?*

Dr. Grown: Asia's economic rise has helped men and women. It has especially helped women to access more healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. In some countries, including Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, the gender gap in labour force participation declined significantly between 2010 and 2014.

The region has made relatively few legal reforms to induce women's empowerment compared to other regions, and several countries still have laws that prevent women from having equal access to productive assets. This is important because many studies show that putting resources in the hands of women benefits themselves, their husbands, and their children.

In Sri Lanka, there have been great strides in improving outcomes for women and girls in health and education, but women's participation in the labour force remains stubbornly low at only 36% (half that of male participation at 76%). Even as the economy expanded, the female labour force participation (FLFP) rate declined from 41% in 2010 to 36% in 2016. Men's participation remained above 75% during the same time.

LKI: There are indications of rising nationalism and populism, especially in the West, and the electoral outcomes of these sentiments are also affecting global geopolitics. *How might these domestic and global political shifts alter attempts to address the gender gap?*

Dr. Grown: Look, it is well known that globalization has ushered in an unprecedented era of growth, lifting millions of people out of poverty. Since 1990, nearly 1.1 billion people have moved out of extreme poverty. But it hasn't worked for everyone. Today, inequality poses a powerful threat to progress around the world. Nations with a wide gap between those who can and cannot access opportunities in life have difficulty sustaining growth and social stability.

We must harness global market capitalism in new ways. It is an incredibly powerful driver of economic growth and prosperity, but it is not a perfect system. We must ensure that capital and knowledge are shared more equally and in the right places at the right times, between markets and between nations. This will make our economic system more effective for everyone.

We need to strengthen trust in our multilateral institutions that have delivered so much, so that they can continue to do so. These are exactly the aspirations built into the two goals of the World Bank Group – to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity for the poorest people.

LKI: Almost half of the world's population is under the age of 25, and a majority live in low-income countries. *What particular challenges should 'gender-smart' policies address with regard to young people; for example, on young women's health and education?*

Dr. Grown: Adolescence is a critical time, because decisions and behaviour established during this period affect boys' and girls' horizons later in life. For boys, adolescence can be a time when adverse gender norms of hypermasculinity really set in. For girls, it's a time when opportunity and mobility can contract.

Policies need to promote the transition of adolescent girls and young women from school to productive employment, such as through business development training, personal initiative training, and technical and vocational training that targets skills in high demand.

But it's important to think beyond school and work, and look at health issues too. More than one-quarter of the Sri Lankan population is between 15 and 29 years old, and more than half of them lack access to sufficient education related to critical sexual and reproductive health issues.

This isn't just the responsibility of government; it also affects the private sector. MAS Holdings, a global apparel producer and a client of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, has rolled out awareness campaigns through its 'Women Go Beyond' programme to educate its young, predominantly female workforce on the importance of reproductive health and rights, and sexuality education. In 2017, UNFPA with the University Grants Commission, introduced an online tool where university students can learn more about their reproductive health and rights: www.roadtoadulthood.lk.

LKI: According to the World Bank, violence against women and girls is a global pandemic, affecting one in three women and girls. *What kind of infrastructure, policies, and other steps do we need to drastically minimise violence against women?*

Dr. Grown: Research shows that one-third of women and girls across all countries and cultures are at risk of experiencing intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. In Sri Lanka, a recent UNFPA-commissioned study found that 90 per cent of women had endured sexual harassment while taking public transport. Twenty-nine per

cent said it had an impact on their school performance, and 37 per cent said it negatively affected their work performance.

Violence against women prevents an economy from attaining its full potential, resulting in lower growth, lower tax revenue, and greater expenses to healthcare, education, the justice system, and social services. The significant cost of gender-based violence (GBV) includes reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and increased costs associated with employee turnover and security.

But this violence can be prevented.

In countries with few or no laws protecting women from GBV, law-making can help. This can send a signal that there is an absence of support for GBV. But it's important that there is also enforcement.

GBV is reinforced and sustained by norms and attitudes that accept it, and therefore, interventions to change negative social norms are important. A successful intervention is SASA!, a program from the Uganda-based non-governmental organisation, Raising Voices, which engages a critical mass of people across all levels of society in awareness-raising and reflection. The SASA! model is being used in more than 20 countries and in different contexts, including in a national-level program in Honduras.

Again, this is an area where businesses have a role to play. Companies can provide staff with training on how to identify gender-based violence, for example, and ensure that staff can access referral information and awareness-raising materials. IFC has led some innovative partnerships with the private sector. For example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade-supported, IFC-led 'Women in Work' program in Sri Lanka plans to bring such 'gender-smart' private-sector led solutions to the country.

LKI: Sweden and Canada are among the countries that explicitly integrate feminist principles into their foreign policy, including on aid. *What is the potential impact of a 'feminist foreign policy' on the gender gap? Can developing countries replicate such a policy?*

Dr. Grown: Canada and Sweden are role models for the rest of the world in this regard. We applaud them for their amazing stance, which leadership has informed policy and focused a diplomatic spotlight on closing gaps between men and women. This large-scale approach can also have a broader effect by accelerating and giving momentum to the work of others.

When it comes to the World Bank's developing country partners, it is evident that when governments have a strong understanding of why it is important to invest in closing gaps between men and women, they are very receptive to the agenda. That's why it's vital that we highlight the broad benefits that come from ensuring that growth is shared among everyone. The 'bottom line' argument is so powerful for (1) increasing female labour force participation, (2) ensuring that women have a voice in democratic institutions, (3) eliminating gender-based

violence, and (4) making sure that boys and girls can each study and excel in whatever subject they may choose.

LKI: Studies show a positive correlation in Germany between lengthening the school day and increasing the female labour force participation rate. *What are some good examples of policies that you have observed around the world, which can reduce the gender gap?*

Dr. Grown: You have highlighted an excellent example of how changing institutional rules and structures is critical. Moves like lengthening the school day, or ending the practice of sending children home in the middle of the day, can free women to work, but there are several things that need to complement that.

For example, do human resource policies create incentives to hire and retain women, such as by enforcing wage equality and fairness and facilitating on-the-job training and overall career progression? Are parents provided with flexibility through parental leave? Is there support for childcare, and how is that subsidised or financed? Is public transport safe and secure, and does it meet the needs of women's schedules?

Once again, there is a role for both the public sector and the private sector. Investment by the private sector in child and elderly care services, for example, is a win-win. It helps parents who can get better quality jobs, and businesses who can become more productive by becoming an 'Employer of Choice.' Workplaces that meet the needs of female and male workers can attract and retain talented employees.

IFC's recent report, 'Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare,' showed how management at the company MAS Kreeda in Jordan realised that employer-supported childcare, which was initially perceived as a cost centre, turned out to be a profit centre by significantly reducing absenteeism and productivity.

Good policies are grounded in a country's own context and close a specific gap while recognising that equality between males and females requires an increase in opportunities – economic, political, and social – for everyone.

Further Reading

Sen, G. and Grown, C. (1988). Development, crises, and alternative visions. London: Earthscan. Available at: http://dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/sites/default/files/articles/devt_crisesalt_visions_sen_and_grown.pdf

World Bank Group. Trade and Competitiveness Global Practice: Gender Practice Note (FY17-20). World Bank Group. Available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/646521509369608419/Trade-and-competitiveness-global-practice-gender-practice-note-FY17-20

World Bank Group. Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction, and Inclusive Growth. (2015). Gender Strategy 2016-2023. World Bank Group. Available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/820851467992505410/World-Bank-Group-gender-strategy-FY16-23-gender-equality-poverty-reduction-and-inclusive-growth

Gambaro, L., Marcus, J. and Peter, F. (2016). School Entry, Afternoon Care and Mothers' Labour Supply. German Institute for Economic Research. Available at: https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.547320.de/dp1622.pdf

The Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute. (2018). Spotlight on Women & Foreign Policy with Kavita Ramdas. Available at: http://www.lki.lk/publication/spotlight-women-foreign-policy-kavita-ramdas/.