

REPORT ON RETURNING MOTHERS CONFERENCE 2021

Preamble

Retaining women in the workforce remains a big challenge in India, and indeed, around the world. According to a report titled “Predicament of Returning Mothers”, released by Ashoka University, 73% of Indian women leave their jobs on giving birth and fail to return. The study found that 50% of working women in the country leave their jobs to take care of their children at the age of 30. Even among those who manage to return, 48 percent drop out within four months of rejoining the workforce. Returning Mothers is a concept to support women who are on career break to return to the workforce.

Objective

With a motto to help women scientists and engineers who want to come back to professional life, the conference deliberates on providing an interface with the industry that is willing to hire women and join or rejoin the national/international workforce. The two days of the conference also deliberates on providing Entrepreneurship-Training and setting up new business end to end. It will be an opportunity for the gathering to explore the creative side and find an opportunity to start their own venture. In short, the conference will aim at providing a highly interactive platform to foster interaction, innovation and collaboration for empowering, engaging and developing innovative mind set to the select gathering.

Mission

- Identify the various requirements for the women to return – such as mentorship, skill development and external and internal support.
- Empower and encourage the women to take up second careers
- Create awareness on importance of planning for the break
- Sensitize the employers about providing opportunities for women willing to come back
- Bridging the gap between mentors and mentees from industry and academics, thereby providing a strong network.

History

The first Returning Mothers was organized as a workshop in Kumaraguru College of Technology in 2014 with the support of IEEE Women in Engineering and Anita Borg Institute for Women and Computing. It was continued as workshops every year till 2018. In 2019, the first Returning Mothers Conference was organized in Bangalore with the support of IEEE Computer Society and the World Bank Group on Energy and Extractives. In 2020, the conference was conducted as the WIE E Symposium with focus on Returning Mothers in Pune and as Returning Mothers track of WIE ILS by Madras Section. This year it was planned to be conducted by IEEE Madras WIE in collaboration with India Council WIE and

other Section WIE Affinity Groups in India on 29th and 30th of August 2021. The Theme for Conference was “Be the Change you want to see in the World” Diversity and Inclusion. The two days of conference consisted of 3 Tracks:

1. Innovation and Entrepreneurship
2. Inspire and Engage and
3. Novelty and Invention

Innovation and Entrepreneurship-

the objectives included:

To provide an opportunity to returning mothers to work on any possible business idea

Involves guidelines from Ideation to Market

1. Idea and Opportunity Evaluation
2. Creative Problem Solving-Design Thinking
3. IPs and value of IP for competitive advantage of business development
4. Manage the sales and Marketing
5. Manage the funds,

Activities :

- Ideathon- Ideathon was a competition in which participants submitted their business ideas and problem-solving solutions.
- Mentoring of selected ideas: Experts from industry, academia, and other government and non-government groups coached participants on their ideas so that they may put their best efforts and knowledge into making their concept the best it could be.
- Talks on Innovation and Entrepreneurship- Experienced experts provided talks and training to mentor and assist participants in business related topics like design and development, marketing, finance, business model building and other aspects of business.
- PitchFest- The most original, unique, and insightful ideas submitted in the Ideathon and mentored by professionals were given the opportunity to display their business model in PitchFest and begin the journey toward bringing their idea to life.

Inspire and Engage –

Inspire and Engage highlights the importance of upskilling oneself on the journey of returning to careers based on the market requirement so that, mapping of jobs with the skills can be done.

the objectives included:

1. Building awareness about new skill sets and emerging technologies.
2. To provide a Hands on Platform for learning new technologies to polishing the required skills to returning mothers.
3. To “Build A collaborative community of Women in technology to Empower”.
4. To encourage women to continue their professional life
5. To provide a platform to collaborate and engage in the professional career

Novelty and Invention:

Intellectual Property is the key element needed to maintain a competitive edge in the market. It is an intangible asset in which businesses can convert into usable resources to generate a competitive advantage. Intellectual Property in today's economy is perhaps the most important asset that an organization can possess. India is currently a major Hub for the R&D sector, which opens a plethora of opportunities to the unemployed.

The objectives included creating awareness on Intellectual Property Rights, International and Indian Patents and the patenting process. The activities for this track focused on providing training on patent applications, following up and the Intellectual Property Rights.

Execution:

To get the conference off to a good start, a distinguished panel discussion on the theme of diversity and inclusion as a way of life in the workplace was held. Dr. Mini Ulanat moderated the session, with Prof. Leila De Floriani from IEEE Computer Society, Jenifer Castillo from IEEE Women in Engineering, Dr. Anne Kuriakose from the World Bank, Joanne Wong from IEEE Entrepreneurship Committee, and Dr. Maria-Alexandra Paun, from Region 8 Women in Engineering as panellists. In every term, a truly diverse panel.

The event had around 50 speakers, 456 participants from 47 countries and 35 jury, evaluators and mentors with more than 150 volunteers from all over the world. It was a great networking opportunity for everyone present and the vibrancy of the sessions showed this.

A post conference course is being offered by one of the partners "THE LIGHTHOUSE" for 40 scholarship winners – a two month intensive course on personal branding through story telling. The course was started during the first week of October and will end in November 2021. The virtual event was hosted on the Run The World platform, a platform with enhanced virtual networking features which was appreciated by all concerned.

Overall it was a very successful conference in every sense – participants, quality of the sessions, platform, design of the theme and delivery and takeaways. The participants gave a glowing feedback during the closing ceremony adorned by the presence of Susan Kathy Land, the President and CEO, Deepak Mathur, the Region 10 Director and other dignitaries from partners organisations.