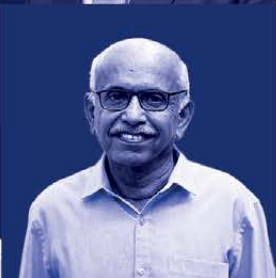# JOHNS HOPKINS
GUPTA-KLINSKY
INDIA INSTITUTE

INNOVATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS FOR GLOBAL PROGRESS

Hopkins India Conference 2025

May 9–10, 2025 | Washington, DC

Contents

Notes from the
Conference Co-Chairs

" The Hopkins India Conference was a powerful affirmation of what becomes possible when we bring together rigorous science, inclusive dialogue, and bold ambition. It was inspiring to witness students, faculty, and partners across India and the U.S. shape a shared agenda for health equity, innovation, and social progress. I hope this conference marks the beginning of a tradition—one that reflects the spirit of collaboration and the urgency of purpose that define our work at GKII. "

Amita Gupta
Conference Co-Chair
Founder and Faculty Co-Chair, Gupta-Klinsky India Institute
Director, Division of Infectious Diseases,
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

" Indiaspora was delighted to partner with the Gupta-Klinsky India Institute for their inaugural Hopkins India conference. The caliber of speakers and the thoughtfulness of discussions left me wanting for more. I am confident that this event will become a mainstay among the annals of prominent India-U.S. university conferences. "

Sanjeev Joshipura
Conference Co-Chair
Executive Director, Indiaspora

Innovations & Partnerships for Global Progress

More than 600 participants gathered for two days of discussion in Washington, D.C. to learn from thought leaders representing academia, government, industry, and civil society who shared their goals for strengthening India-U.S. collaboration through research, education, and innovation. Centered on the theme "Innovations & Partnerships for Global Progress," the event included more than 80 speakers representing 100 institutions. The 2-day agenda comprised discussions on urgent priorities and emerging opportunities across six core themes: India–U.S. strategic partnerships in an evolving world; rethinking development and sustainability; new challenges in healthcare; the internationalization of higher education and equitable partnerships; digital health and AI for inclusive growth; and women at

The conference affirmed GKII's belief in partnerships rooted in respect, reciprocity, and shared learning.

the center. Summaries of session discussions and key takeaways are highlighted in this report.

Across sessions, several common threads emerged. Speakers highlighted democratic values, human dignity, and equity as guiding principles — in healthcare, economic participation, justice, and opportunities for growth. These concerns extended beyond the India–U.S. relationship, reflecting shared global challenges. Both nations continue to grapple with fairness and inclusion, pointing to the

urgency of building systems that prioritize equity and collective progress.

Cultural experiences were deeply integrated into the conference. A moving exhibition by SEWA showcased grassroots resilience during COVID-19, while a performance by JHU Shakti used Bharatanatyam dance to highlight caste discrimination, illustrating how cultural expression can powerfully complement academic discourse.

We hope this report offers both a record of what was shared and an invitation to what comes

The conference focused on cross-sector collaborations to develop innovations that start in India and can be scaled for global impact.

next. Thank you to our speakers, partners, volunteers, and the entire GKII community for making this conference possible. Let's continue to build bridges across disciplines, borders, and institutions in pursuit of progress that is truly global.

About Organizers

The **Gupta-Klinsky India Institute (GKII)** at Johns Hopkins University is a university-wide platform established in 2020 to mobilize Hopkins' collective expertise in partnership with India. GKII's mission is to **bring the best of JHU and India together** to tackle pressing societal challenges through collaborative research, education, policy development, and practice.

This inaugural conference was organized by GKII in collaboration with key partners and supporters. **Indiaspora**, a network of global Indian-origin leaders, and the **American India Foundation (AIF)** joined as conference partners to engage the Indian diaspora and development sector. These partnerships underscore the conference's focus on cross-sector collaboration and the Indian diaspora's role as a force for good.

This conference was made possible in part through generous support from **the Bloomberg Center Nexus Awards,** an internal funding program by Johns Hopkins University that empowers interdisciplinary teams to tackle pressing global

issues. These awards enabled the Hopkins India Conference to bring together leading voices from across sectors to shape the next chapter of India–U.S. collaboration. We also acknowledge the generous support provided through the **Girish and Himangi Rishi Endowment**, for this conference. Such philanthropic contributions, along with the transformational gift from **Raj Gupta and Steven Klinsky** that founded GKII, reflect the strong commitment to advancing the Hopkins–India collaboration.

By the Numbers

80+
Speakers

Speakers included policymakers, academic experts, industry CEOs and grassroots leaders.

600+
Participants

Representing academia (39%), corporate (41%), NGOs and UN (4%), government (2%), finance (2%), media (<1%), and the Indian diaspora.

100+
Institutions

Attendees and speakers represented organizations from the U.S., India, and beyond, showcasing a truly global gathering.

>50%
Women speakers

Women composed over 50% of the speakers, a result of deliberate practice to ensure women's leadership is at the forefront.

24%
C-suite executives

Nearly a quarter of the conference attendees were C-suite executives. This high-level participation underscores the event's relevance to decision-makers shaping institutional strategy and public policy in both India and the U.S.

India-U.S. Strategic Partnerships in an Evolving World

India-U.S.: A Defining Partnership for the 21st Century ▶

> **"In a world of flux, our two countries have forged a truly genuine, comprehensive strategic partnership—one rooted in shared values, mutual trust, and global responsibility"**
>
> **Vinay Mohan Kwatra**
> **Indian Ambassador to the U.S.**

India's Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra delivered a keynote address that framed the conference in the evolving India–U.S. relationship, characterizing it as one of the most consequential bilateral partnerships of the 21st century. His central insight was that this relationship rests not only on shared democratic values but also on **"habits of cooperation"** that have deepened over a decade of strategic engagement. The address set the tone for the conference – pragmatic, optimistic, and focused on the long-term strategic alignment between two global democracies.

Key Takeaways:

- **Strategic TRUST Initiatives:** Cooperation spans defense, critical and emerging technologies, education, and people-to-people exchanges. This breadth of engagement has created institutional trust that allows the two countries to collaborate with agility.

- **Economic Synergies:** India's expanding innovation ecosystem and domestic growth are creating new avenues for U.S. collaboration, from trade and investment to joint R&D.

- **Diaspora Diplomacy:** The Indian diaspora continues to serve as a durable and dynamic bridge between the two nations, amplifying cultural and policy linkages.

- **Bipartisan Endorsement:** Ambassador Kwatra highlighted sustained bipartisan support for stronger India–U.S. relations in Washington, positioning the partnership as resilient across political transitions.

Growing Frontiers of India–U.S. Collaborations in the Domain of Research, Education, Business, and Policy

Session Chair: Sanjeev Joshipura, Executive Director, Indiaspora

Nisha Biswal, Senior Advisor, The Asia Group; Former Deputy CEO, U.S. International Development Finance Corporation

Sumona Guha, National Security Expert; Former Senior Director, South Asia, National Security Council

Arun Singh, Senior Counsellor, The Cohen Group; Former Indian Ambassador to the U.S.

The panel offered a vision of the bilateral relationship centered not only on defense and trade but also on talent, innovation, and shared global responsibilities.

Panel members discussed the geopolitics of the India-U.S. relationship against the backdrop of a changing global order and underscored how strategic ties between the world's largest democracies are increasingly vital for regional stability and addressing global challenges. In his overview, former Indian Ambassador Arun Singh noted India's foreign policy priorities and the opportunities for deeper U.S. engagement, including defense cooperation, Indo-Pacific strategy, and multilateral coordination. U.S. experts Nisha Biswal and Sumona Guha offered the American perspective, affirming bipartisan support for stronger India relations and highlighting recent milestones (such as technology-sharing agreements and elevated dialogue on Indo-Pacific security).

A recurring theme was the convergence of values and interests, panelists agreed that democratic values and common strategic goals (counter-terrorism, open trade, climate action) bind the two nations. They also discussed challenges, including navigating India's relationships with other global powers and addressing trade frictions, with a consensus that candid communication and respect for each other's autonomy are key.

Key Takeaway

The India-U.S. partnership is multifaceted and poised to shape the 21st-century geopolitical landscape. Strengthening institutional ties from defense and economy to people-to-people links will require sustained dialogue. Academic forums can build trust and inform policy by bringing together seasoned practitioners and fresh perspectives.

Geopolitics in Flux: India's Expanding Role on the World Stage

Session Chair: Sadanand Dhume, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute

Lisa Curtis, Senior Fellow, Director, Indo-Pacific Security Program, Center for a New American Security (CNAS)

Tanvi Madan, Senior Fellow– Foreign Policy, Center for Asia Policy Studies, Brookings

This panel focused on India's geopolitical recalibration amid rising power competition and regional instability. Madan offered a historical perspective, illustrating how India has strategically navigated shifting global dynamics by balancing relationships, particularly with China. She emphasized India's nuanced approach to regional diplomacy and its emerging voice in multilateral forums representing the Global South. Curtis discussed India's expanding Indo-Pacific role, noting how its regional posture has transformed from focusing on border diplomacy to taking proactive steps in broader security ecosystems and global partnerships. Dhume traced India's recalibrated global strategy, highlighting how it blends strategic autonomy with selective international alignments. He pointed out India's increasing leadership in global development beyond traditional diplomacy.

Key Insights:

- **Balancing Act:** India's foreign policy blends strategic autonomy with pragmatic alignment, managing relations with the U.S. while engaging Russia and navigating tensions with China.

- **Neighborhood First:** India's diplomatic posture reflects a tension between short-term regional challenges (border security, terrorism) and long-term aspirations (Indo-Pacific leadership, global governance reforms).

- **Global South Outreach:** Engagement with Africa, Latin America, and ASEAN nations signals India's bid to be a voice for the Global South, expanding its global footprint without military expansionism.

- **Strategic Communication:** The panel highlighted the importance of narrative, noting that India's story as a democracy, technology partner, and development leader is increasingly resonating in multilateral forums.

Key Takeaway

India's evolving foreign policy reflects a careful balance between strategic autonomy and pragmatic alignments, managing ties with major powers while asserting its leadership in the Indo-Pacific. Partnerships, particularly with the U.S., are seen as critical to reinforcing India's global influence.

Challenges and Opportunities for India–U.S. TRUST Initiative

Session Chair: Joshua White, Professor of the Practice, International Affairs at Johns Hopkins SAIS

Dhruva Jaishankar, Executive Director, ORF America

Kriti Upadhyaya, Founder, IndUS Tech Council, C2C Advanced Systems

The session explored the TRUST framework ("Transforming Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology") as a vehicle to deepen India–U.S. collaboration in emerging technology domains including AI, cybersecurity, defense innovation, and space science and creating shared standards, joint R&D efforts, and robust policy ecosystems.

Key Insights:

- **Co-Development vs. Transfer:** The TRUST framework envisions co-innovation rather than one-way tech transfers, encouraging collaborative R&D in defense, cyber security, and space.

- **Standard-Setting Power:** By working together on emerging tech governance, from AI ethics to 5G/6G standards, India and the U.S. can shape global norms that reflect democratic values.

- **Policy Infrastructure:** The panel emphasized the need for enabling frameworks, such as IP agreements, regulatory harmonization, and trusted supply chains, to unlock the full potential of tech ties.

- **Institutionalization:** To ensure continuity, the panelists advocated for institutional platforms (think-tanks, tech councils, academic consortia) that can weather political changes and drive long-term agendas.

Key Takeaway

The geopolitics track revealed a shared recognition that India and the U.S. must deepen their partnership to navigate an increasingly multipolar and uncertain world. Strategic alignment, especially in defense, technology, and education, will be key. Academic institutions can support this trajectory by convening cross-sector leaders and translating dialogue into durable institutional linkages.

This panel clarified that technological collaboration is no longer peripheral to geopolitics, it is its cutting edge. TRUST, as both a policy and a metaphor, positions India–U.S. cooperation as central to shaping the future.
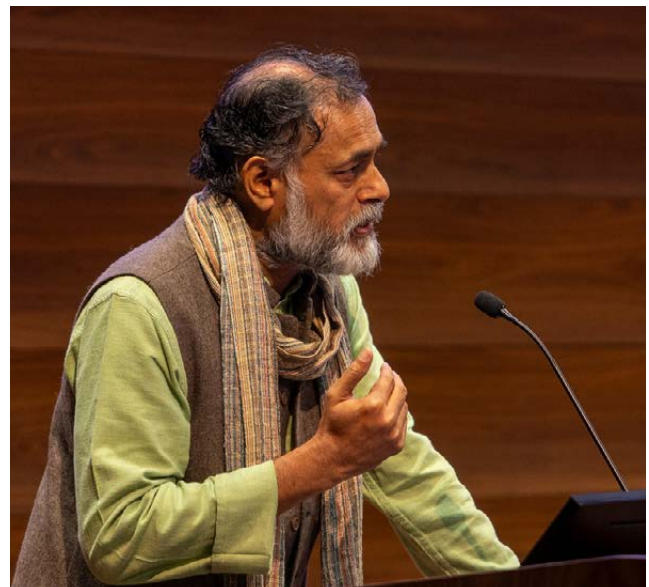
Rethinking Development and Sustainability

What Kind of India Do We Seek?

In a reflective and provocative keynote, scholar-activist Yogendra Yadav challenged the dominant development paradigm that equates progress with Western-style industrialization and growth. He described this as a "superstition of our times," the belief that the trajectory followed by the Global North is the only viable path forward. Yadav argued that India must reject this one-size-fits-all model and instead craft a development vision rooted in its own ecological, cultural, and democratic realities.

He introduced the idea of "deep politics" a transformative approach that draws from India's grassroots knowledge, participatory traditions, and ecological wisdom. Rather than viewing development as a race to catch up with industrialized nations, Yadav proposed it as a process of self-definition. This shift, he suggested, would allow India to imagine a future where equity, sustainability, and dignity are foundational to, and not side effects of, growth.

Using agriculture as a case study, Yadav illustrated how local, community-driven models offer alternatives to extractive economic systems. He cited examples from farmers' movements and ecological initiatives, particularly those in regions like Kachchh and Bastar where traditional knowledge, collective governance, and regenerative practices are creating new paradigms of rural prosperity and resilience. These examples, he emphasized, are not nostalgic throwbacks but are innovative responses to the crises of climate, inequality, and alienation.

"Once we realize that alternatives are not about going back to our past, but about imagining and shaping our future, this becomes a collective search"

Yogendra Yadav, President, Swaraj India

Yadav's keynote was ultimately a call to radical imagination: to reimagine India's future not through the lens of GDP or industrial might, but through plural, regenerative, and deeply democratic values. He urged citizens, scholars, and policymakers to reject models that are environmentally destructive or socially exclusive and instead participate in a "collective search" for a development path that reflects the richness of India's diversity and democratic spirit.

Building Development Alternatives: An Economy of Nurturance

Session Chair: Rina Agarwala, Professor of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University

Cathy Feingold, AFL-CIO Director of International Development and Deputy President, International Trade Union Confederation

Reema Nanavaty, Director, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

Vijayendra Rao, Lead Economist, Development Research Group, The World Bank

The panel introduced the concept of an "Economy of Nurturance," re-imagining development through the lens of care, equity, and grassroots leadership. In a conversation bridging academic theory and grassroots practice, Professor Rina Agarwala and the panelists discussed alternative economic models that prioritize well-being and social justice. Reema Nanavaty shared SEWA's experience empowering millions of women in India's informal sector. (SEWA, Self Employed Women's Association, is India's largest central trade union of informal women workers, with more than 3.2 million members across 18 states). Cathy Feingold brought a global labor perspective, maintaining that a nurturing economy requires strong labor rights, social protections like universal health. She outlined pillars of a caring economy, such as investing in care work and sustainable jobs, which resonated with SEWA's approach on the ground. Vijayendra Rao provided insights from development economics, noting that traditional economic policies often overlook local knowledge and "human infrastructure." He emphasized that inclusive policy design, informed by those at the grassroots, can lead to more effective and just outcomes. One striking takeaway was how closely aligned the members of the panel were on redefining progress: GDP growth alone is not enough; one must also measure improvements in quality of life, equity, and dignity. The discussion, rich with applause-inducing moments, highlighted real stories (like SEWA members' resilience during the pandemic) as evidence that empowering those at the margins strengthens the entire economy. The panel reframed economic progress as a shared endeavor rooted in community well-being. The presence of SEWA at the conference, including a related exhibition () check pagination at final stage, underlined a core message: development must be by and for the people.

Key Takeaway

A paradigm shift toward an "economy of nurturance" could address systemic inequities. By valuing caregiving, informal work, and environmental sustainability, policymakers can craft more resilient and humane economies. This session affirmed that knowledge institutions must listen to and learn from grassroots innovations. Marrying academic research with on-the-ground wisdom leads to development solutions that are not only effective but also equitable and inclusive.

Fireside Chat: Economy

India's Journey to Becoming a "$30 Trillion Economy" ▶

Session Chair: Pravin Krishna, Chung Ju Yung Distinguished Professor of International Economics and Business at Johns Hopkins University

Speaker: V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor (CEA), Government of India

This session examined India's bold vision of becoming a $30 trillion economy in the coming decades. Panelists discussed the **macroeconomic reforms, investments, and partnerships** required to sustain high growth. Nageswaran outlined India's fiscal and policy roadmap, emphasizing structural reforms in infrastructure, manufacturing, and skilling to drive growth. U.S.-based experts added perspectives on global market trends and how **India-U.S. trade and innovation ties** can fuel India's economic rise. A key insight was the importance of **inclusive growth**, ensuring that prosperity extends to all segments of society. The CEA highlighted that boosting

women's workforce participation, as well as upskilling youth, could significantly increase India's GDP. The discussion reinforced the value of academic and policy collaboration in addressing economic challenges. The panel's takeaway was optimistic: with the right policy mix and global partnerships, India can progress toward its ambitious goal. However, it must prioritize education, equity, and sustainable practices to truly realize a $30T economy that benefits everyone.

Key Takeaway

India's economic trajectory is promising but not predetermined, strategic reforms and inclusive policies (such as investing in human capital and technology) will be crucial. Academic institutions can contribute by providing research-based evidence for policy and facilitating dialogues that connect government, academia, and industry in support of India's economic ambitions.

Roundtable: Global Food Systems and Policy

Session Chair: Neha Kumar, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute

Noora-Lisa Aberman, Research Lead, Gender Unit, The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

Yan Bai, Economist, The World Bank

James Thurlow, Director, Foresight and Policy Modelling, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)

The roundtable highlighted the urgency of transforming global food systems to deliver sustainable, equitable, and nutritious diets, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like India. Neha Kumar, Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI, presented findings from the forthcoming 2024 Global Food Policy Report in her opening remarks. She emphasized the urgent need to address the 'double burden' of malnutrition, under- and overnutrition, noting that poor diet quality is the leading cause of global disease.

Yan Bai added a data-driven perspective, describing efforts to standardise affordability metrics for healthy diets and track them globally. In India, he noted, roughly 50% of people cannot afford the lowest-cost nutritious diet, with affordability driven both by income inequality and high costs of foods like dairy and legumes.

James Thurlow focused on the trade-offs between nutrition and broader economic development goals. He argued for investment portfolios that balance improvements in diet quality with other priorities like poverty reduction and job creation, citing research in India that shows no single food value chain can deliver on all fronts.

Noora-Lisa Aberman spotlighted gendered barriers in food systems, from women's limited access to credit and formal employment to structural exclusion in policy processes. She emphasised the importance of designing food system policies that are not gender-blind and integrating women's lived experiences into market regulations, safety nets, and entrepreneurship programs.

Throughout the discussion, panelists noted that improving diets will require systemic shifts, not just in food production, but in education, income distribution, and behavioural change. Efforts must tackle cultural norms, intra-household inequalities, and the powerful marketing forces of ultra-processed foods.

Key Takeaway

Building sustainable food systems requires coordinated policy reform, gender-responsive programming, and strategic investment in nutrition-sensitive agriculture. Academic and policy institutions can play a catalytic role in generating the data, partnerships, and innovations needed to shape food futures that are just, healthy, and climate resilient.

Policy Actions for India-U.S. Collaborations on Climate and Health

Session Chair: Gigi Gronvall, Professor of Environmental Health and Engineering, Bloomberg School of Public Health; Senior Scholar, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security

Katherine Hadda, Senior Visiting Fellow, Chair on India and Emerging Asia Economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Aishwarya Nagar, Senior Analyst, Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security

This session addressed how India and the U.S. can collaborate to advance climate resilience and sustainable development. Experts noted that India, home to one-sixth of humanity, is at the frontline of climate change impacts, from severe heat waves and shifting monsoons to rising sea levels. The panel explored India's climate strategy, including its commitments under the Paris Agreement and bold initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and renewable energy targets (450 gigawatts of renewables by 2030). Indian climate policy leaders on the panel spoke about balancing economic growth with emissions reduction, emphasizing India's push for solar and wind energy, electric mobility, and climate-smart agriculture. U.S. scientists and policy specialists highlighted areas for joint research, such as climate-resilient crop varieties, air pollution mitigation in cities, and improving climate data sharing. A key focus was on climate justice and adaptation: panelists discussed how to protect vulnerable communities in India, from farmers facing erratic rains, to addressing the needs of the urban poor during floods, through measures like early warning systems, insurance, and climate resilient infrastructure. The conversation recognized that

technology transfer and green finance from the U.S. could bolster India's efforts, while India's large-scale deployment of clean energy technologies offers lessons in cost reduction and innovation. The discussion underscored the value of knowledge partnerships in this domain; for instance, Johns Hopkins public health and engineering experts can work with Indian institutions to study climate's health impacts and develop adaptive solutions. This thematic discussion underlined an important lesson: addressing climate change is inherently interdisciplinary and international. Solutions will require scientists, policymakers, and communities from both countries working together.

Key Takeaway

Climate resilience is a shared challenge that transcends borders. Collaborative expertise can drive significant progress in sustainable development. The session reinforced that by linking academic research with policy action, both nations can co-create strategies to safeguard our planet and people.

New Challenges in Healthcare

India's Cancer Challenge: Scaling Prevention, Screening and Treatment ▶

Session Chair: Nilanjan Chatterjee, Professor of Biostatistics and Genetic Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins University

Alka Dwivedi, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute

Surendranath S. Shastri, Professor, Department of Health Disparities Research, University of Texas; MD Anderson Cancer Center

Sanjay Shete, Betty B. Marcus Chair in Cancer Prevention, Professor of Biostatistics and Epidemiology, University of Texas

Kala Visvanathan, Professor in Epidemiology and Oncology, Johns Hopkins University

The session on cancer care focused on a strategic imperative: to confront India's growing cancer burden not merely with innovation, but with systems capable of delivering it equitably. Experts pointed to late-stage detection, inadequate diagnostics, and disjointed care pathways as key barriers not from lack of scientific progress, but from fragile infrastructure and uneven access. The conversation emphasized that scalable impact depends on strong institutional linkages among research, population data, and service delivery. Emerging technologies like AI-enabled screening and smartphone diagnostics hold promise, but panelists cautioned that they must be grounded in representative datasets and robust governance. A standout example was India's low-cost CAR T-cell therapy, proof that academic-industry partnerships can lead global breakthroughs when directed at local needs. The takeaway was clear: innovation must be embedded within resilient systems, or else risk reinforcing existing inequities.

Key Takeaway

To reduce India's cancer burden, innovation must go hand-in-hand with equitable systems. Advances like AI screening and CAR T-cell therapy will only scale impact if anchored in strong infrastructure, inclusive data, and accessible care pathways.

India's Role in Eliminating Tuberculosis Globally by 2030

Session Chair: Amita Gupta, Florence Sabin Professor of Infectious Diseases, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine; GKII Faculty Co-Chair

Soumya Swaminathan, Former Chief Scientist, World Health Organization

Richard Chaisson, Professor of Medicine, Epidemiology and International Health, Johns Hopkins University

This critical panel examined how India can achieve its ambitious goal of ending tuberculosis (TB) by 2030, ahead of global targets. Experts discussed India's multifaceted approach to TB elimination, highlighting both progress and remaining gaps. Public engagement and stigma reduction were identified as key to ensuring early care-seeking behavior, while the importance of strong surveillance systems and operational research was underscored as essential to tackling drug-resistant strains. The conversation also spotlighted how academic partnerships are supporting evidence-based policy and implementation in high-incidence districts, and how global lessons can inform national progress. Speakers emphasized that ending TB in India will require coordinated efforts across sectors, including government investment in health systems, private sector innovation, and community-level support for patients. Addressing latent TB in vulnerable populations such as children and adolescents was also acknowledged as a key step in TB elimination efforts.

Key Takeaway

Eliminating TB in India by 2030 demands a whole-of-society approach, blending strong surveillance, stigma reduction, cross-sector coordination, and evidence-based strategies to tackle drug resistance and protect vulnerable populations.

The Changing Reality of Palliative Care in India: From Margins to Mainstream Healthcare

Session Chair: Avani Prabhakar, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Uma Mahadevan, Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner, Government of Karnataka

Carolin Elizabeth George, Head, Department of Community Health, Palliative Care and Research, Bangalore Baptist Hospital

M R Rajagopal, Chairman Emeritus, Pallium India Adjunct Professor of Global Oncology, Queen's University, Canada

Bhavna Seth, Assistant Professor of Medicine; Director Global Health, Dorothy P. and Richard P. Simmons Center for Interstitial Lung Disease; Division of Pulmonary, Allergy, Sleep, and Critical Care Medicine; University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

Sweety Thomas, Chief of Staff, Ajit Isaac Foundation

This deeply moving panel explored how palliative care in India is evolving from a marginalized service to a foundational pillar of mainstream healthcare. Once misunderstood as a last-resort measure, palliative care is now being reframed as a holistic approach. Speakers traced its growing national importance, highlighting milestones such as the 2014 launch of India's National Palliative Care Strategy and Kerala's globally recognized community-based model. The 2018 amendment easing access to morphine was also noted as an important development.

Challenges remain: inconsistent supply chains, workforce shortages, and weak integration into public systems, particularly in rural areas. In response, panelists shared innovations like Karnataka's effort to embed palliative care into the Panchayati Raj system, using local task forces and convergent governance. They also spotlighted critical gaps in medical and nursing education, stressing the need to train professionals in compassionate, person-centered care. Ultimately, panelists urged that palliative care be recognised not as a "frill," but as a core part of universal health coverage and human dignity.

Key Takeaway

Palliative care in India is gaining long-overdue recognition as a core component of compassionate, person-centered healthcare. To scale its impact, integration into public systems, training curricula, and local governance is essential, ensuring dignity and relief are accessible at every stage of illness

Navigating the Changing Landscape of Funds and India's Emerging Role ▶

Session Chair: Sunil Solomon, Vice Chair for Research, Department of Medicine; Director, Center for Infectious Diseases India, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Chris Beyrer, Gary Hock Distinguished Professor in Global Health; Director, Duke Global Health Institute

Moupali Das, Vice President, Clinical Development, HIV Prevention and Virology Pediatrics; Head, HIV Prevention, Gilead Sciences

Monica Gandhi, Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco

Shruti Mehta, Dr. Charles Armstrong Chair and Bloomberg Centennial Professor in Epidemiology, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

The panel reimagined India's role in global HIV leadership, moving beyond aid dependency to a future defined by local innovation, strategic funding, and shared global stewardship.

This discussion explored how India is primed to lead the next phase of the global HIV response amid shifting donor priorities and changing epidemiology. Panelists reflected on the transition from Global North-led funding models to a more decentralized landscape, where India's domestic capabilities and public-private innovation will be critical. Chris Beyrer and Monica Gandhi stressed the need to maintain scientific momentum, particularly in the areas of prevention, community engagement, and access to generic medications. Shruti Mehta and Moupali Das discussed how new research priorities, such as long-acting PrEP and viral suppression strategies, will need to be integrated into India's health systems with an equity lens. Session Chair Sunil Solomon highlighted India's unique dual position: it is both a recipient and a driver of HIV innovation. The panel advocated for stronger regional leadership, evidence-driven funding allocations, and global partnerships rooted in mutual accountability, not dependency.

Key Takeaway

India is poised to shift from a beneficiary to a shaper of global HIV policy. To realize this potential, it must invest in scalable innovations, community-led models, and South-South collaborations which are anchored in a strategic, values-based public health vision.

Raising the Bar in Primary Health Care: India's Journey and Unfinished Business

The panel examined India's evolving primary healthcare landscape, spotlighting the unfinished work of equity, quality, and systemic integration.

Against the backdrop of persistent gaps in access and outcomes, panelists discussed how India can build a resilient and inclusive primary healthcare system. The speakers drew on field experience, peer-reviewed systems research, and policy implementation to reflect on what it will take to move from fragmented delivery to comprehensive, people-centered care. Rajani Ved highlighted the need for community health systems that are responsive to local realities, while Sara Bennett emphasized the importance of governance structures that enable accountability and learning. Somesh Kumar outlined innovation opportunities through digital health and workforce training, and Krishna Rao called attention to the financing models and metrics that can scale impact. A common thread was the need to embed equity and participation into every level of the health system, not just as moral imperatives, but as strategic enablers of long-term efficiency and trust.

Session Chair: Sara Bennett, Professor and Vice Chair, Department of International Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; GKII Faculty Co-Chair

Somesh Kumar, Senior Director, New Initiatives and Innovations, Jhpiego

Krishna Rao, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Rajani Ved, Director of Health, Gates Foundation

Key Takeaway

India's path to universal primary healthcare requires more than infrastructure—it demands systems thinking, inclusive governance, and context-specific innovation. The panel also underscored GKII's unique role in convening research, implementation, and policy voices to inform health reforms that are scalable, equitable, and sustainable.

Non-Communicable Diseases: The New Pandemic in India

Session Chairs: Uttara Bharath Kumar, Associate Professor, Department of Health, Behavior and Society, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; **Chirag Parikh**, Director, Division of Nephrology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Lawrence Appel, Professor, Johns Hopkins University Schools of Medicine and Bloomberg School of Public Health

Dinesh Nair, Senior Health Specialist, South Asia Region, The World Bank

Prabir Roy-Chaudhury, Professor of Medicine; Co-Director, University of North Carolina (UNC) Kidney Center; President, American Society of Nephrology

Tara Thiagarajan, Founder andt Chief Scientist, Sapien Labs

Framed as the "new pandemic," this session addressed how NCDs, ranging from kidney disease and cancer to mental health conditions, are straining India's health infrastructure and widening health inequits. Panelists argued that current systems remain skewed towards acute care and underinvest in the chronic care pathways necessary for managing NCDs. Experts called for a pivot toward integrated, lifecycle-based healthcare, especially for vulnerable populations with limited access to early diagnosis or follow-up.

Tara Thiagarajan underscored the need for better neurocognitive health data to understand and intervene in mental health trends, while Chirag Parikh and Prabir Roy-Chaudhury spoke to the urgency of rethinking nephrology care within India's constrained resources. World Bank's Dinesh Nair highlighted the opportunity to embed NCD care within primary health systems, supported by community health workers and digital tools. A unifying theme across the panel was the necessity of data-informed policy and long-term investment in prevention as a public good.

Key Takeaway

India's fight against NCDs demands system innovation, robust public health planning, and a reallocation of resources toward preventuon and chronic care. Experts called for a pivot toward integrated, lifecycle-based healthcare, particularly for vulnerable populations with limited access to early diagnosis or follow-up.

Internationalization of Higher Education and Equitable Partnerships

Internationalization of Higher Education: India-U.S. Educational Collaborations for Global Competitiveness

Session Chair: Rajika Bhandari, Co-Founder, South Asia International Education Network

Sunil Kumar, President, Tufts University

Leah Mason, Deputy Director of Research, Evaluation and Learning, Institute of International Education (IIE)

Hanan Saab, Associate Vice President, Government Relations and Public Policy, Association of American Universities (AAU)

Shuchita Sonalika, Director and Head–North America, Confederation of India Industry (CII)

This discussion centered on the role of higher education in strengthening India-U.S. ties in academia and industry to drive innovation and global competitiveness. Panelists included university leaders and education experts who examined how academic institutions can serve as bridges between the two countries. They noted the long history of educational exchange with tens of thousands of Indian students studying in the U.S. annually, and how this contributes to India's workforce development and research output. A theme of discussion was the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, which encourages global engagement and the establishment of foreign campuses, a timely opportunity for U.S. universities to invest in education in India. Panelists discussed the potential for a wide variety of collaborative educational models: joint degree programs, research centres of excellence on Indian campuses, co-developed skilling programs and microcredentials, Collaborative

Online Learning and Virtual Exchange programs, and expanded scholarship initiatives to make education more accessible to global learners. Speakers highlighted that Indian students and faculty enrich American institutions, and that collaborations with Indian institutes (IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, etc.) have led to breakthroughs such as joint medical research resulting in low-cost healthcare innovations. The panel also addressed emerging mobility challenges such as visa and regulatory hurdles, and the need to ensure equitable access to quality education). GKII's own initiatives like the India RISE Fellowship, Girish and Himangi Rishi Student Travel Award and seed grants for joint research, were cited as best-practice examples of catalysing academic partnership with a reciprocal India-U.S. benefit. The insight was clear: knowledge sharing and talent exchange are foundational to the next phase of India-U.S. relations.

By institutionalizing collaboration through dual degrees, academia-industry linkages for in-demand skilling programs and micro-credentials, and faculty exchanges with collaborative research funding, both countries stand to gain in innovation capacity and cultural understanding.

Key Takeaway

Education and research partnerships form the bedrock of a sustainable India-U.S. relationship. Investing in these linkages yields long-term benefits: a skilled workforce, scientific discoveries, and increased people-to-people ties. The conference panel made it evident that universities play a pivotal role as conveners and facilitators of such cross-border knowledge networks, ultimately contributing to both national development and global progress.

Digital Health and AI for Inclusive Growth

How Is India Preparing an AI-Ready Workforce?

Session Chair: Sridevi Sarma, Vice Dean, Whiting School of Engineering, Johns Hopkins University

Ritu Agarwal, Wm Polk Carey Distinguished Professor, Carey Business School

Ashwin Bharath, CEO, Galent; Co-Founder and Executive Chairman, Revature

Shibu Vijayan, Chief Medical Officer, Global Health, Qure.ai

The panel explored how India can strategically build an AI-ready workforce that is globally competitive, socially inclusive, and aligned with national innovation goals.

Leaders from academia, healthcare, and industry discussed the structural shifts needed to equip India's workforce for an AI-driven future. Session Chair Sridevi Sarma framed the conversation by noting the urgency of integrating AI literacy and technical training into education systems at all levels. Ashwin Bharath highlighted the role of scalable skilling platforms and industry partnerships in bridging the gap between demand and talent, especially for underserved populations.

Ritu Agarwal provided a policy and academic perspective, arguing that AI preparedness isn't just about coding skills—it also requires ethical literacy, cross-disciplinary thinking, and institutional support for innovation. Shibu Vijayan added a healthcare perspective, showing how AI tools are already reshaping diagnostics and delivery in India, and emphasized the need for workforce training to match the speed of adoption.

Key Takeaway

India's ability to lead in AI hinges on coordinated investment in human capital, particularly through accessible skilling, ethical frameworks, and cross-sector partnerships. Academic institutions can support this transformation by connecting global expertise with local training and research ecosystems.

Innovation and Health Technology Interventions in India

This panel explored how India can harness medtech innovation to address systemic gaps in health access, affordability, and outcomes. The conversation highlighted India's dual identity as both a site of need and a hub of ingenuity. Panelists discussed how India's scale and complexity create a compelling testbed for designing economical, scalable solutions that can be deployed globally.

Damini Agarwal shared how Infinite Biomedical Technologies developed sensor-based solutions for prosthetics tailored to the Indian context, noting that adaptive tech must reflect the lived realities of users. Jordan Shuff emphasized the importance of field-testing and co-design with clinicians and patients, calling for deeper collaboration between engineering and implementation science. Anand Kapai of Siemens Healthineers outlined strategies for localising medical devices and advancing AI-integrated diagnostics at affordable price points. Youseph Yazdi and Kunal Parikh reflected on the role of training and capacity-building in medtech entrepreneurship, arguing that India's innovation potential will be unlocked by investing in design talent, translational research, and robust regulatory pathways.

A unifying insight was that medtech in India should not merely import models from high-income countries but instead develop context-specific solutions with the potential to leapfrog legacy systems. The panel called for a shift from product development to systems

Session Chair: Youseph Yazdi, Johns Hopkins Center for Bioengineering Innovation and Design (CBID)

Damini Agarwal, Chief Technology Officer, Infinite Biomedical Technologies, LLC

Anand Kapai, Vice President, Global Marketing, Siemens Healthineers

Kunal Parikh, Assistant Professor, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine

Jordan Shuff, Founder and Executive Director, Visilant

thinking, embedding innovation within policy, supply chains, and care delivery. By doing so, India can shape the future of health technology not just for itself, but for other resource-constrained settings worldwide.

Key Takeaway

India's medtech revolution must be built on context-aware design, local manufacturing, and systems integration. Cross-sector collaboration among academia, startups, and government is essential to scaling innovations that are affordable, effective, and globally relevant.

Harnessing Digital Tools and Infrastructure for Improved Health Outcomes

Session Chair: Smisha Agarwal, Director, Center for Global Digital Health Innovation, JHBSPH

Rama Chellappa, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor and Interim Co-Director, Johns Hopkins Data Science and AI Institute

Marelize Gorgens, Lead, Digital and AI for Human Capital, The World Bank

Shibu Vijayan, Chief Medical Officer, Global Health, Qure.ai

Focusing on the intersection of technology and societal impact, this session delved into how digital health and artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming healthcare and development in India. Moderated by Smisha Agarwal, an expert in digital health, the panel highlighted success stories such as India's digital public goods, for example, the Aadhaar digital ID and UPI payment system, and explored their analogues in health and education. Panelists discussed how telemedicine platforms expanded access to care in rural areas during the pandemic, and how AI-powered tools (like diagnostic algorithms and health chatbots) are being piloted to assist doctors and patients.

A major point of discussion was ensuring these innovations are inclusive and equitable. While India leads in some digital initiatives (with massive scale deployments), challenges like the digital divide (unequal internet access), data privacy, and the need for culturally adaptive AI were raised. An industry entrepreneur described how partnerships between tech companies and public health programs in India are addressing local needs, for instance, AI analytics for tuberculosis screening in government hospitals co-developed with JHU researchers. Another speaker touched on regulatory "sandboxes" for health-tech in

India that allow safe testing of innovations. The panel collectively emphasized responsible AI principles like transparency, fairness, and avoiding bias are crucial when deploying technology in diverse settings. A significant takeaway was the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration: computer scientists, clinicians, public health experts, and policymakers must all work together to ensure tech solutions truly improve health outcomes. The session also sparked ideas for future joint work, such as training programs in implementation science and technology policy exchanges.

Key Takeaway

Digital innovation holds great promise to advance health and development in India, but it must be steered with a people-centric approach. The session underscored that by combining India's scale and tech prowess with Johns Hopkins' research expertise, there is an opportunity to develop and deploy tech solutions that are effective, safe, and reach underserved populations. Continued dialogue and partnerships will ensure that AI and digital health evolve as tools for inclusive growth rather than widening gaps.

Women at the Center

Women Shaping India's Future: A Blueprint of Inclusive Economic Development

In an engaging keynote address, Smriti Irani made a powerful case for placing women at the center of India's growth story. Rejecting the notion that women are merely passive recipients of development, she reframed them as catalysts of economic resilience and agents of governance reform. Drawing a historical arc from Rani Lakshmibai to contemporary women entrepreneurs, scientists, health workers, and panchayat leaders, Irani celebrated the often-unseen labor that women contribute to nation-building.

She spotlighted major policy initiatives such as Jan Dhan Yojana, Mudra, and Stand-Up India, explaining that these schemes have enabled millions of women to access formal credit, launch businesses, and become financially self-reliant. These transformations, she noted, are not isolated success stories—they signal a broader societal shift where women's leadership is increasingly visible in both grassroots and high-tech domains, from rural governance to India's space program.

Beyond statistics and schemes, Irani's keynote was a call to reimagine development through the lens of gender equity. She urged deeper, more systemic investment in women's education, safety, and economic participation not as a matter of justice alone, but as a prerequisite for India's global competitiveness. Her vision was clear: the next chapter of India's growth must be written with women at the forefront, rather than in the margins.

"If you see an Indian woman, trust her, fund her, and follow her leadership, because she's not just a chapter in India's story, she's the turning point."

Smriti Irani, Union Minister, Government of India (2014–24)

Key Takeaway

Women's empowerment is not a side agenda. It is the foundation for inclusive, sustainable growth. By unlocking women's full potential, India can accelerate progress across economic, social, and political dimensions.

From Pipeline to Powerhouse: Catalyzing Women's Leadership in STEMM ▶

Session Chair: Anita Shet, Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Shereen Bhan, Leadership Development Director, WomenLift Health

Kalpana Kanthan, Chief Development Officer, American India Foundation

Kanta Singh, Deputy Representative, UN Women India

Manuela Villar Uribe, Senior Health Specialist, Health Nutrition and Population Global Practice, World Bank

This closing plenary convened an intergenerational group of women leaders to reflect on what it takes to build truly inclusive systems of science, leadership, and care. The discussion moved beyond surface-level narratives of representation, focusing instead on the structural barriers that constrain women's participation in STEMM, ranging from workplace safety and caregiving burdens to property rights and internalized gender norms.

Kanta Singh delivered a powerful and candid account of how safety at home, in public spaces, in workplaces, and online is one of the most persistent barriers to women's freedom and opportunity. She underscored how a single act of violence can derail multiple lives and called for industry-wide responsibility to make workplaces accessible, equitable and safe. She and others highlighted how sexual harassment in prestigious organizations often goes unreported due to reputational fears, a silence that must be broken if gender parity is to be realized.

Shereen Bhan and Kalpana Kanthan added that true empowerment involves financial independence, decision-making power, and space to fail and grow. The panel encouraged women to pursue fellowships, own property, and demand equal investment in their aspirations not as a favor, but as a right. Sharing his perspective as an audience member, Mathuram Santosham reflected on male allyship, drawing from his personal and professional experience.

The conversation closed with a call to action: that systemic change begins with individual conviction and collective courage. By building ecosystems of mentorship, gender-sensitive policy, and intersectional support, institutions can move beyond pipelines to cultivate true leadership among women in science and technology.

Key Takeaway

Gender equity in STEMM isn't just about recruitment it's about retention, safety, agency, and systems of support. The panel called for bold, structural changes across institutions, backed by both policy and practice. As part of this commitment, GKII announced the launch of the India RISE Fellowship to support early-career researchers and innovators. The session closed with an invitation to all: to invest in yourself, expand your networks, and shape a future where women thrive not in spite of the system, but because they helped build it.

Cultural Highlights

Hum Sab Ek (We Are One): SEWA's Response to the Pandemic

The conference included an installation curated by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) titled "Hum Sab Ek (We Are One): SEWA's Response to the Pandemic." Spanning two floors of the Bloomberg Center, this immersive exhibition showcased how SEWA's members mobilized during COVID-19 to support their communities—from producing face masks and sanitizer, to organizing healthcare and financial relief for informal workers. Curated by Satchit Balsari, Associate Professor in Emergency Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Hiteshree Das, design researcher pursuing a Master's in Design Studies at Harvard University, the exhibit combined storytelling with data, photographs, and artifacts from SEWA's fieldwork. Conference participants joined guided tours to learn how grassroots innovation saved lives and livelihoods in a time of crisis. The exhibit's message, that unity and local leadership can overcome even global challenges, resonated deeply with the conference's spirit. It provided a moving, first-hand look at community resilience, complementing policy-oriented discussions with a human touch. Many attendees cited the SEWA exhibit as a highlight that grounded the conference in real-world impact.

JHU Shakti Performance on Caste Discrimination

Day 2 of the conference concluded on a vibrant note with a performance by JHU Shakti, Johns Hopkins University's premier Indian classical dance team. In a packed auditorium, Shakti's dancers delivered a captivating Bharatanatyam piece that was more than just a cultural showcase, it was art as advocacy. The performance, introduced as "Dance as Tradition, Resistance, and Celebration," shed light on the theme of caste discrimination. Through intricate choreography and expressive storytelling, the dancers depicted the journey from oppression to empowerment, weaving in the narrative how a traditional art form can challenge social hierarchies. This theme was particularly poignant: Bharatanatyam itself was historically inaccessible to lower castes, so Shakti's use of it to condemn caste bias was a

powerful statement of inclusivity. The audience gave a standing ovation as the final pose was struck, recognizing both the artistic excellence and the courage of the message. For many, especially those new to Indian classical arts, the performance underscored how cultural expression can reinforce the conference's knowledge agenda, reminding us that data and dialogue must be coupled with cultural empathy and understanding.

These cultural elements, the SEWA exhibit and Shakti's dance, set the Hopkins India Conference apart from a typical academic event. They engaged attendees' hearts and minds, illustrating that India-U.S. partnerships flourish not only in conference rooms and laboratories but also through sharing culture and human stories.

Voices from the Conference

"Conferences like these are so important, they create centres of community. In my work connecting Indians and the Indian diaspora, being in the same room is how we break barriers, find common ground, and build lasting collaborations. It's not just about new connections, but also rekindling older ones and seeing young people excited about India's future. That's where our real opportunity lies."

- Swathi Nuli, MPH, Ashoka Diaspora Networks

"What's exciting about this conference is how it brings together international relations and public health, two areas of strength for Johns Hopkins, and creates a unique space for interdisciplinary dialogue."

– Dhruva Jaishankar, Executive Director ORF America

"As an Indian in the United States, I'm thoroughly enjoying the conference, especially in these tumultuous geopolitical and economic times. It's been invaluable to hear directly from experts and gain insight into areas I'm not familiar with. I'm grateful to Johns Hopkins University for creating this opportunity to broaden our horizons."

– Abhik Sengupta, Program Associate North America, Confederation of Indian Industry

"Unlike similar conferences, the Hopkins event has a geographic edge. Being in the nation's capital, it taps directly into Washington's rich ecosystem of policymakers, think tanks, embassies, and global institutions, giving the event unique access to decision-makers and influencers."

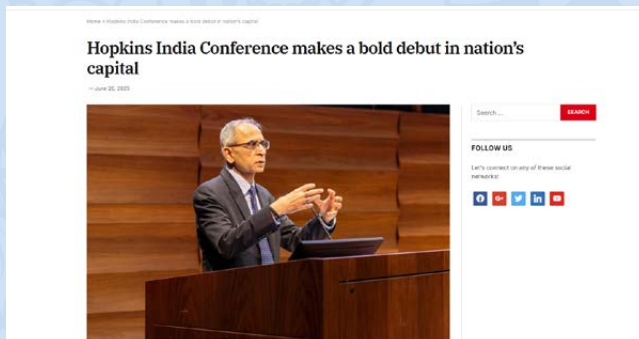**– Asif Ismail,** CEO and Publisher, The American Bazaar

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Media and Documentation

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Volunteers

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