

Leading Together: 2022 Dialogues on Gender and Inclusion & Sustainability



Pictured: Leading Together students and faculty, including Dr. Priya Lakshmi Daniel as Stella Maris Co-ordinator, Associate Dean Prof. Kate MacNeill, Deputy Associate Dean (International – India) Dr. Dolly Kikon, and Program Co-ordinator Kirsty McKellar.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final report is to:

(1) summarise the Leading Together engagement that occurred from April to December in 2022, namely focusing on the Leading Together 2022 Dialogues hosted by Stella Maris College in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

(2) draw attention to positive outcomes resulting from the Leading Together initiative, presenting the findings of the evaluation, and finally

(3) highlight the desire and need for ongoing engagement in 2023 and into the future.

1.1 THE TEAM

The Leading Together 2022 Dialogues were co-convened by a team at the Faculty of Arts comprising A/Prof Kate MacNeill, Dr. Dolly Kikon, Kirsty McKellar, Dr. Wajeehah Aayeshah and Yasmeen Hassan, and by Stella Maris College (Autonomous) led by Priya Lakshmi Daniel, IQAC Co-ordinator and Dr. Sr. Rosy Joseph, Principal of Stella Maris, and supported by the Stella Maris Student's Union. Other notable co-ordinators include Dr. Shivani Singh from Savitribai Phule Pune University, Dr. Rajdeep Singha from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati Campus), and Dr. Hewasa L. Khing from Tetso College.

1.2 PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In December 2019, Stella Maris College hosted the Women and Leadership Conference, co-convened by Dr. Sr. Rosy Joseph, Principal, Stella Maris College and A/Prof Kate MacNeill, Associate Dean, Education and Students, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne. The subsequent Leading Together Dialogues in 2021 built on the success of the 2019 conference that delivered rich opportunities for co-creation of knowledge, between individuals and institutions, and between students and academics, across and within the two cities of Chennai and Melbourne.

Both institutions have a record of co-creation. Students at Stella Maris organised the 2019 conference, engaged in planning alongside their teachers, and volunteered for all the activities. The Faculty of Arts' Transformative Learning Strategy is grounded in co-creation, and recent student-led consultations demonstrated the enthusiasm with which our students embrace these opportunities.

The project builds on an existing academic collaboration between Associate Professor Kate MacNeill, University of Melbourne and Professor Priya Lakshmi Daniels, Associate Dean of Students at Stella Maris College, University of Madras. Professor Daniels visited the University of Melbourne as a United Board Fellow for three months in late 2018, during which time a strong professional collaboration was formed, and a truly reciprocal mentoring process. This led to the Women and Leadership Conference in Chennai in 2019, with over 400 undergraduate students attending. Dr Dolly Kikon, Senior Lecturer at the School of Social and Political Sciences, and Senior Research Advisor at the Australia India Institute, was a keynote speaker at this conference.

In 2021 came the introduction of new partners and new opportunities to expand the reach of the Leading Together initiative. An online conference, the Leading Together 2021 Dialogues on Women and Leadership included collaboration with an additional three institutions: Savitribai Phule Pune University, Tetso College and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati).

This record of activities provided a strong basis for a sustainable partnership in 2022, at an institutional level, between academic staff and finally between students. In 2022 the conference maintained the partnership between all five institutions, co-convened by the University of Melbourne and Stella Maris College, taking place in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

2.0 LEADING TOGETHER IN 2022

In 2022, Leading Together comprised a two-day conference and workshop co-ordinated by the University of Melbourne and co-convened and hosted by Stella Maris College in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. This year's conference was entitled 'Leading Together: 2022 Dialogues on Gender and Inclusion & Sustainability'.

2.1 AIMS

Leading Together is an annual initiative that (1) draws on and expands upon an existing collaboration between academics at the University of Melbourne and Stella Maris College (University of Madras, Chennai), Tetso College, Savitribai Phule Pune University and Tata Institute for Social Sciences (Guwahati Campus), for the creation of new resources and knowledge; and (2) works toward positive engagement outcomes for Bachelor of Arts undergraduate students at the University of Melbourne and the four partner institutions as they align with the Engaging with India Strategy 2020-2024 toward 'building a shared future'.

2.2 CO-CREATION PRINCIPLES

In its approach, Leading Together adopts innovative strategies that draw on co-creation principles, including:

- a **learner-centred approach** whereby we recognise collaboration (between institutions, and between students and academics at each institution) as part of pedagogy
- the encouragement of **collaboration** between students at each institution in ways that will enhance peer-learning and mentoring, and internationalise co-curricular activities
- an innovative approach to **building two-way capacity**, with a focus on mentoring women and people with diverse SOGIESC¹ as leaders
- a digital platform for the delivery of the project, a format that encourages **horizontal exchange**, and lessens conventional hierarchies.



Students work in teams during the workshops to discuss what this year's theme means to them across a variety of contexts

2.3 ACTIVITIES

Four key activities took place as part of Leading Together 2022:

(1) Student-led cultural performances allowed for creative and novel ways to respond to the 2022 conference materials and theme. Significantly, this segment demonstrated to faculty that artistic expression in the way of dance, song, poetry and film were a powerful tool for facilitating a learner-

¹ SOGIESC stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics.

centred approach that was culturally appropriate, as well as a way of encouraging knowledge sharing through a diverse range of media.

(2) Panel discussion with industry experts from India and Australia provided students with the opportunity to hear from and pose questions to specialists of their fields. Panellists included Prof. Lindsay Oades, Director and Professor at the Centre for Wellbeing Science at the University of Melbourne, Mayura Vikramkumar, LGBT Activist and Assistant Manager and Inclusivity Ambassador of Equitas Small Finance Bank, and Smitha Sadisvan, Disability Activist and Accessibility Consultant for the Electoral Commission of India. Student delegates later reported that it was important for them to see a panel that reflected this year thematic areas of gender, inclusion and sustainability. This activity was also able to support an overarching objective of providing opportunities for horizontal exchange that lessen conventional hierarchies.



Priya Lakshmi Daniel (left) speaks with panellists Mayura Vikramkumar (middle) and Sharon Buteau (right) on issues of gender, inclusion and sustainability

(3) Student presentations addressing this year's themes: gender, inclusion & sustainability took place on Day 2 of the conference, with each institution provided with a 20-minute slot for presenting. Students took this time to lead discussions surrounding an array of topics, adopting engaging presentation styles that included PowerPoint presentation, poetry prose and student-directed and filmed short-film. This activity contributed to our objective of supporting students to feel confident in taking a lead on creating and presenting original materials.

(4) Workshops on Day 2 encouraged deeper reflection and engagement with this year's dialogues on gender, inclusion and sustainability. Facilitated by Program Co-ordinator Kirsty McKellar, students worked together in groups to reflect on the panel discussion, their peers' presentations and to address



Students present their work on what the 2022 theme means to them in the community context during Day 2 workshop proceedings

broader questions pertaining to, for example, the Sustainable Development Goals, and how these dialogues apply to contexts at the individual, community, institutional and global levels. This activity supported the aforementioned co-creation principles Leading Together was founded upon, in particular supporting **collaboration** between students at each institution in ways that enhance peer-learning and mentoring, internationalise co-curricular activities, and promote **two-way capacity building** with a focus on mentoring women and people with diverse SOGIESC² as leaders.

² People with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and/or Sex Characteristics.

3.0 DISCUSSION

An evaluation of Leading Together 2022 was conducted through a post-program survey using Polly Everywhere, and the collection and analysis of written student testimonials.

3.1 POST-PROGRAM SURVEY

'1. In your opinion, what was the best aspect of the conference in 1-4 words?'

42.3 per cent of respondents spoke about the **positive interactions and relationships** they fostered with other students, including:

- 'The start of newfound friendship which captured the true purpose of "Leading together". The conference was an amazing experience, even as a mere spectator...'
- 'Meeting people of different universities'
- 'It was refreshing to meet people and watch them perform who were from different places across the globe. The topics discussed were common, but I gained more knowledge'
- 'Interaction with various teams'
- Student interactions, Q&A sessions.

Almost a third of students (30.8 per cent) also responded that the best aspect of the conference for them related to **knowledge exchange**, including:

- 'Different people coming together to share the same idea'
- '...Coming together and sharing our experience, thoughts and idea's through various activity has been such a brilliant way to learn more about one another'

For some student respondents (19.2 per cent), the **exploration of culture**, including the cultural performance segment, was the best aspect of the conference.

- 'Exposure to various cultures across India. It was splendid to interact with people from all over the country'
- 'The themes were great and the cultural exchange we had was also truly eye-opening'
- 'The cultural presentation'
- 'Enlightening cultural performances'



Students from TISS sing an original composed work as one of their contributions to the cultural presentations

'2. What segment of the conference did you value most to least?'

Response options	Rank
Cultural presentations (day 1)	1
Panel discussion with industry experts (day 1)	3
Student presentations (day 2)	2
Workshop activities and group work (day 2)	4

- 'Allowed more people to participate in the workshop.'
- 'Even more panel discussion.'

3.2 TESTIMONIAL RESPONSES

Students from all five institutions were asked whether they would provide a testimonial around their experience and what they learned or gained from engaging with Leading Together in 2022. The following are three key themes that emerged from their testimonies:

1. Cross-cultural impact

- 'It was a very thrilling experience to witness people with different ideas and opinions brought up from different cultures and different parts of the world coming together as one and sharing ideas, learning and also experiencing new fruits of life'
- 'Honestly this project has helped me to grow and learn more about my culture'
- 'Being able to attend it in person gave me a learning opportunity - to interact with students from various backgrounds and to gain me perspectives - that I cherish.'



Stella Maris College students perform for the cultural presentation

2. Relationship-building

- 'Being able to attend it in person gave me a learning opportunity - to interact with students from various backgrounds and to gain me perspectives - that I cherish. It gave me a platform to express my opinions and gain new ones. I am delighted as well as I got to make new friends and meet experts in various fields.'

3. Exposure to new perspectives and knowledgebases

- 'This online leading Together Project opened my eyes in many different ways and made me realise the potential that can be tapped within us. Being challenged to inspire, create and bring about awareness and change really brings out our imaginations and creativity and this is something that every student should be engaged in, to discover and lead by example. This enthralling experience will never be forgotten.'
- 'The online Leading Together Project was honestly a challenging one for we had to think of ways to impact people and pique their minds with the content that we present online.'
- 'Working with the team in the project, incorporating the themes and compiling the ideas widened my horizon more and it was truly an enriching and a great learning experience.'



Students share their most important learnings from the conference, including one who writes 'Start with Awareness! You'll Get to Acceptance'

4.0 CONCLUSION

Underpinning the engagement since 2019 is Leading Together as a **cross-cultural collaboration** that supports student-led dialogues between different countries, institutions and communities. A significant outcome of this initiative is the **peer-to-peer learning and mentoring**, including the **strengthening of networks** for students to draw on into the future.

This continues to involve pivotal **knowledge-sharing and storytelling** between different communities, including Indigenous communities. In 2022 when one student was asked what their favourite part of the conference was, they answered that it was hearing the traditional folk tales and stories from another participant's Indigenous community. Leading Together supports fostering relationships between students from different communities and backgrounds, leading to significant cross-cultural dialogue both within India and between Indian partners and the University of Melbourne.

In addition, students and faculty from our partner institutions emphasise the importance of Leading Together as an opportunity for undergraduate students to take on **leadership positions**, and gain **new opportunities to collaborate** within an academic, international arena. Many delegates indicated that it was their first time engaging in an international conference, with some identifying Leading Together as the first opportunity they have encountered to expand their leadership skillset as young change-makers.

Students and academic staff from all five institutions have indicated the importance of Leading Together as an annual engagement, supporting its continuation into 2023 and beyond.

December 29th, 2022

Report prepared by Kirsty McKellar

ANNEXURE 1: STUDENT-LED CULTURAL PERFORMANCES



Pictured: Day 1 conference students, faculty and guests with special appearance from Palanivel Thiagarajan, Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu, accompanied by Margaret Rajan.



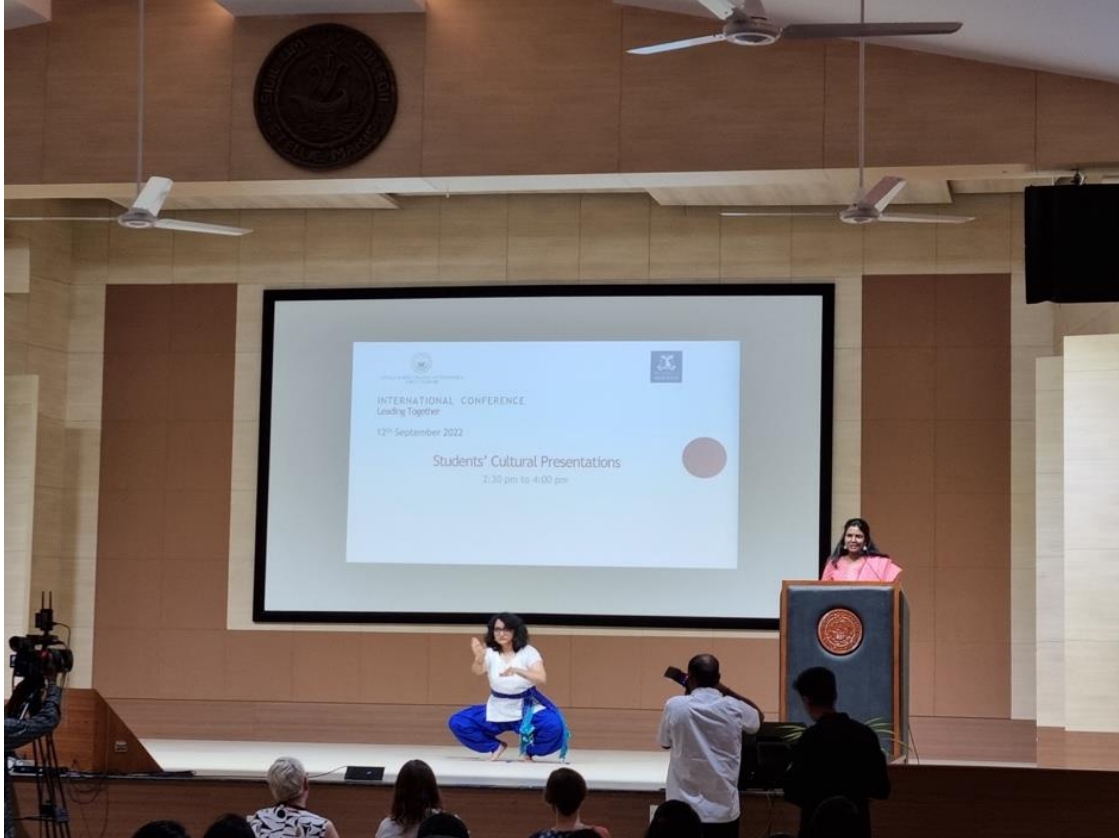
Pictured: Tetso College cultural presentation



Pictured: Stella Maris College cultural presentation



Pictured: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus cultural presentation



Pictured: Savitribai Phule Pune University cultural presentation



Pictured: University of Melbourne cultural presentation



Pictured: Tetso College students present Associate Dean Prof. Kate MacNeill with a traditional necklace from Nagaland, India.

ANNEXURE 2: PANEL DISCUSSION



Panel discussion pictured left to right: Dr. Dolly Kikon (facilitator), Dr. Laskshmi Priya Daniel (facilitator), Mayura Vikramkumar, Sharon Buteau, Rukmini Shekhar, Prof. Lindsay Oades, and Smitha Sadisvan.



Pictured left: Palanivel Thiagarajan, Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu; Right: Dr. Dolly Kikon, Deputy Associate Dean (International – India)

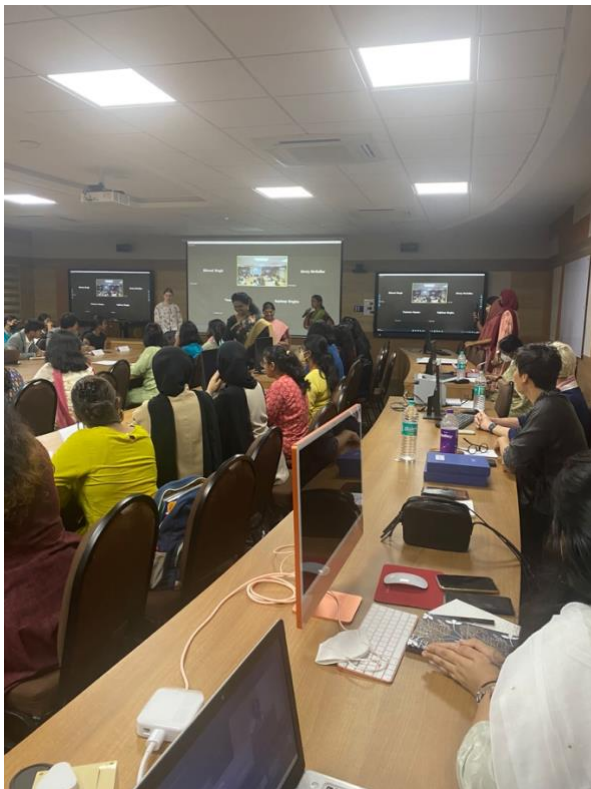


Pictured: Student and faculty audience for the panel discussion

ANNEXURE 3: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

Students from each institution were given 30-minute slots to share their perspectives on this year's theme: Gender and Inclusion & Sustainability.





Pictured: Students from each institution presenting their original materials.

ANNEXURE 4: WORKSHOPS



Pictured: Students share their most important learnings from the conference, including one who writes 'Start with Awareness! You'll Get to Acceptance'.



Pictured: Students participating in the Day 2 Workshop; A/Prof. Kate MacNeill talking to students.



Pictured: Students worked in teams to consider what this year's conference theme of Gender and Inclusion, and Sustainability meant to them across a variety of contexts.



Pictured: Students worked in teams to consider what this year's conference theme of Gender and Inclusion, and Sustainability meant to them across a variety of contexts.



Pictured: Two student delegates participating in Day 2 workshops of Leading Together 2022.



Pictured: Program Co-ordinator Kirsty McKellar concludes Day 2 Workshops with an activity that asks students to reflect on their favourite learning from Leading Together 2022.



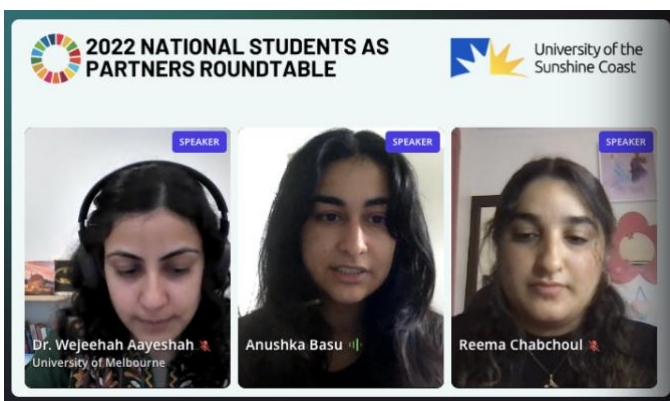
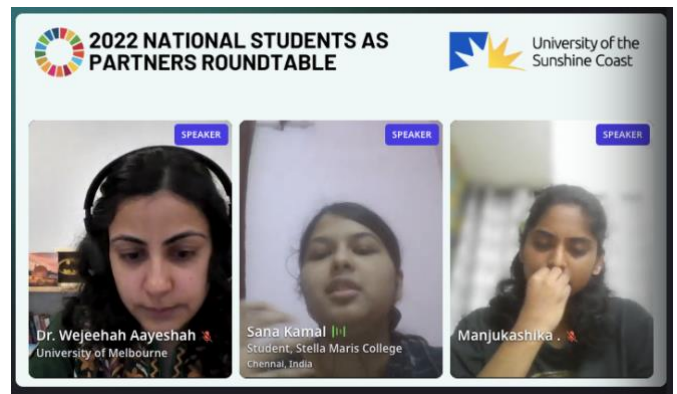
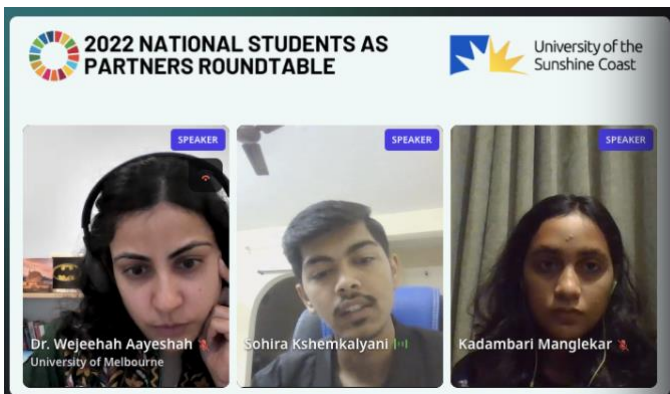
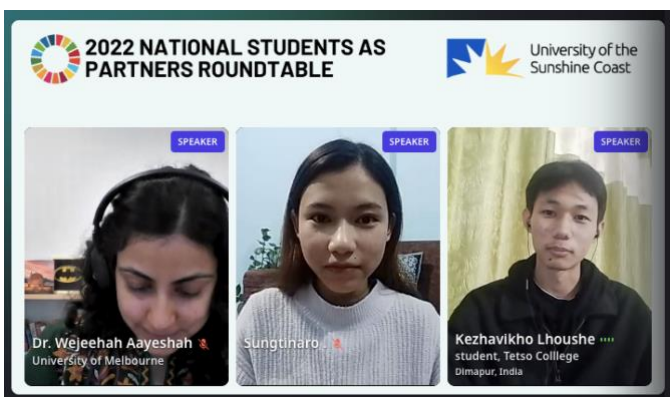
Pictured: Faculty in the front row with students participating in Day 2 workshops at the back.

ANNEXURE 5: 2022 NATIONAL STUDENTS AS PARTNERS ROUNDTABLE

Students were invited to share their experiences of Leading Together as part of the 2022 National Students as partners Roundtable, held at the University of Sunshine Coast.

The National Students as Partners Roundtable is an annual event that brings members of the Australian Students as Partners Network together to:

- **SHARE** Students as Partners practices, ideas and experiences;
- **DISCOVER** new ways of considering Students as Partners in higher education;
- **NETWORK** with a diversity of Students as Partners practitioners; and
- **HARNESS** the creativity of staff and students to address teaching and learning challenges.



Pictured: Students participating online at the 2022 National Students as Partners Roundtable conference.