

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank's MD on why gender inclusivity is a business imperative

Recognising gender imbalance in the BFSI sector, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank has taken proactive steps to foster gender inclusivity, empower women leaders, and create a workplace that champions diversity.



The Banking and Financial Services (BFSI) sector has long struggled with gender representation at leadership levels. A 2019 Deloitte survey revealed that women held just 18% of board seats in Nifty 50 companies in India, highlighting a significant gap in inclusivity. Recognising this imbalance, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank is striving to be a beacon of [gender diversity](#), fostering an environment where different perspectives drive collaboration, innovation, and sustainable growth.

“Our focus on gender representation aligns with our broader mission—to reflect the communities we serve while creating equal opportunities within our organization. This commitment strengthens our strategic vision and fosters a culture of innovation, empathy, and inclusion,” says Sanjeev Nautiyal, MD & CEO, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank.

Structured initiatives for growth and leadership empowerment

At Ujjivan, nurturing women leaders is a cornerstone of its talent strategy. The belief that diverse leadership drives business success has led to initiatives such as:

WISE (Women's Initiative for Success & Empowerment): A structured mentorship and skill-building program designed to prepare women for leadership roles.

EDGE: A leadership development initiative aimed at enhancing opportunities for women to grow and achieve their career aspirations.

Theatre-based Training (Upcoming): A unique experiential learning program under WISE, aimed at fostering self-expression and leadership skills.

“These efforts have enabled Ujjivan to sustain a strong, diverse, and inclusive leadership team, translating into better business outcomes and strong stakeholder trust,” mentions Nautiyal.

They currently have 56% women representation on their Board of Directors. Women form the majority, with five of nine board members, comprising four Independent Directors and one Executive Director.

‘Unpause’: A Pathway for Women Returning to Work

Understanding the challenges faced by women re-entering the workforce after a career break, Ujjivan launched ‘Unpause’—a dedicated initiative to ease their transition.

“Returning to work isn’t just about skill-building. It’s about fostering psychological safety and inclusion. Many women worry about the relevance of their skills and balancing work with personal responsibilities,” explains Nautiyal.

To address these concerns, ‘Unpause’ offers:

Tailored training and mentorship to rebuild confidence.

Flexible work arrangements for smoother transitions.

A supportive network ensuring they feel empowered to contribute meaningfully.

The program is already making an impact, with 19 women onboarded in FY 2024-25, reflecting its growing success.

Creating a Safe & Inclusive Workplace

Ujjivan’s inclusivity efforts extend beyond gender, fostering diversity across socio-economic backgrounds, regions, and abilities. The bank also prioritises the safety and well-being of its employees through work-life balance policies such as:

- Childcare Support: Creche facilities for women returning post-maternity leave.
- Flexible Maternity Leave:
- 26-week standard leave for all women employees.
- Extended leave options based on tenure.
- Work-from-home flexibility for 3 months post-maternity.

Safe Work Hours:

- Any woman working beyond 8 PM is provided with a GPS-enabled transportation service (reimbursed by the company). If GPS is unavailable, a supervisor personally accompanies the employee at home.

These initiatives ensure a safe, supportive, and equitable work environment, reinforcing Ujjivan's commitment to gender parity and employee well-being.

Scaling Diversity & Inclusion Across the BFSI Sector

With 34 women in leadership roles and 204 women in mid-management, Ujjivan is actively working to set new benchmarks in gender representation. But the bank's vision extends beyond its walls.

"As a 'Great Place to Work' for fourteen consecutive years, and a recipient of accolades like 'Best Workplaces for Women' and 'India's Best BFSI Workplace (2024)', we aim to inspire other institutions to adopt equitable practices," says Nautiyal.

While still in the early stages of its diversity journey, Ujjivan is keen to collaborate with like-minded organisations and industry bodies to drive sector-wide change. Learning from industry leaders, the bank continues to refine its strategies, ensuring inclusion remains at the heart of its success story.

"We remain committed to progress through innovation, collaboration, and a steadfast focus on equitable opportunities for all," Nautiyal adds.

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank is proving that gender inclusivity is more than a corporate agenda—it's a business imperative. By investing in leadership development, workforce re-entry programs, and workplace safety, the bank is not just bridging the gender gap—it is reshaping the future of the BFSI sector.

SOURCE – People Matters