As a self-professed introvert who thrives on quiet work, volunteering to moderate a virtual Women's Empowerment event wasn't exactly on my agenda. Public speaking? Moderating discussions? Not my forte. Yet, I surprised myself by not only enjoying the experience but also learning and growing immensely.

****Championing Women's Empowerment****

Our Better World brought together diverse organizations championing women's empowerment through education, equal opportunity, and mental health.Twelve organisations would be represented by a "human book" in our virtual Human Library, sharing their experiences.  Encouraged by Nicole, our community manager who was coordinating the event, I decided to facilitate the session with Project Baala, a non-profit tackling menstrual health – a stigmatised and neglected topic in India.

****Breaking the Silence Around Menstrual Health****

As someone who uses self-deprecating humour to manage my social anxiety, facilitating a virtual audience discussion on a topic I initially thought irrelevant to me seemed daunting. Thankfully, I was wrong.

During the event, attendees were divided into breakout rooms with different organisations. My room featured two inspiring individuals from Project Baala to be our “books” for the session, Subhojit Bakshi and Shiwani Agrawal. Subhojit, a molecular biology post-graduate, works in the development sector focusing on menstrual health. Shiwani, an avid supporter of Project Baala initiatives, has also pioneered her own projects. Together, they've empowered over 50,000 individuals, training women and men, especially in rural areas, to become menstrual health advocates and sustainable menstrual product salespeople.

****From Perfectionism to Genuine Curiosity****

I had prepped extensively in anticipation of the human library sessions, expecting to strictly moderate the session. However, I found myself asking questions as the conversation flowed, and my anxieties faded, replaced by genuine curiosity. I wanted to understand their motivations and experiences. The lack of menstrual health support and the stigma women faced deeply affected me. For example, I was appalled to learn that menstruating women were denied entry to religious grounds due to perceived "uncleanliness."

****A Privileged Perspective Broadened****

While I understood these beliefs stemmed from misinformation and tradition, I couldn't help but feel a mix of injustice and sadness. Growing up in a matriarchal family (where the only men in the family were myself and my grandpa), menstruation wasn't taboo, nor was talking about it uncomfortable. This experience highlighted the vast differences misinformation and prejudice can create. Gender violence and discrimination were foreign concepts to me, and while I knew they existed, a sense of shame washed over me for not being more informed.

At one point, I asked Subhojit and Shiwani if a male advocate would be less impactful than a female one in rural communities. Their response, surprising yet hopeful, was that gender didn't matter. What truly mattered was conviction – the ability to connect with their communities and inspire change.

The breakout session flew by. Though relieved (introvert tendencies!), I was incredibly grateful for the experience. Stepping outside my comfort zone not only helped me confront my fear of public speaking but also highlighted the importance of these conversations in driving change. This process has led me to be more proactive in raising my hand when the opportunities present themselves.