

Gender Policy in Muskaan

(April 1, 2021)

It is felt necessary to formalize a gender policy within the organization, currently some aspects of which are in our organizational manual, but some aspects have not been put in writing. We hope this document will guide our work, while also holding us accountable towards this. We recognize that patriarchal functioning seeps into all places and all minds. Without a conscientious and deliberate effort, this can continue unnoticed.

We are thankful that in our 20 years of work, we have been able to set high standards for ourselves and strive to keep this up. Today, we are 33 women members and 8 male members in our overall team, with a women leadership in many programs.

The overall effort is to provide an enabling environment for women within the organization, the communities with whom we are working, families of our team members and strengthen the gender sensitivity among all.

What we mean by Gender

Muskaan understands that gender refers to the attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the socio-cultural relationships between women and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context specific and changeable. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in activities undertaken, access to and control over resources as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, which also takes into consideration factors such as class, race, economic status, ethnic group and age.

Muskaan adopts a gender perspective, which means focusing towards building equity on both women and men and their relationships with each other and resources. The organization aims at mainstreaming gender by creating an enabling working environment that in turn attracts and helps to retain gender sensitive staff, while ensuring a dignified and secure working environment.

Since Muskaan is working towards promoting meaningful education in communities, and enhancing the agency of vulnerable groups in decision-making while building access to justice and opportunities for growth, it means achieving a better analysis of access, content, behaviours within communities. Only with a gender perspective would we be able to examine the status quo and bring in appropriate interventions and practices.

The gender policy is an integral part of all its organizational policies, programmes and projects and involves building a culture that understands the issues and policies, which respect diversity and gender, related concerns. A mere statement of policy and objectives does not ensure the concerns relating to addressing the gender. Towards achieving the above objectives, clear indicators need to be defined to evaluate and assess the organizations commitment towards gender equity on a periodic basis.

Objectives of Gender Policy

- To strive for gender justice and effectively integrating gender concerns at both institutional and programmatic level.
- To explicitly state the organizational commitment towards gender
- To provide a direction and a framework towards building gender related agenda, within the organizational agenda and policy domain
- To create equal opportunities and a conducive environment for women and men at work place,
- To foster a social, physical and psychological environment that will enable employees to work productively.

Our Team

a) **Staff composition/representation**

- Recruiting adequate women staff and ensuring the balance also at senior levels; with an objective of achieving a numerical gender balance in all posts at all levels.
- Ensuring equal opportunities among male and female staff for personal growth, in promotion benefits, training and working conditions
- Ensuring equitable representation and participation of men and women in the core group, Board of trustees and in various functional committees of the organization
- There will be adequate representation of women in recruitment and interview panels.
- We will be ensuring that the conceptual clarity and sensitivity on gender issues will be one of the important selection criteria in recruitment processes.
- We will encourage people of othergender identities and sexualities to become part of the team, and will make efforts to ensure that the environment is conducive for their working.
- Salaries will be based on experience and abilities (as per HR manual), where a team member's sex will not have any bearing.
- Equal wages would be paid to men/women for same work.

b) **Performance reviews:** Gender sensitivity will be one of the performance indicators for assessing employees.

c) **Maternity and Paternity Leave–**

- A woman employee who has put in at least one year of service after confirmation shall be entitled for 6 months of Maternity Leave on full pay.
- Men employees when their spouses have children shall be entitled for 15 days of leave either immediately after child birth or before child birth or up to any time within the first six months of the birth.
- In case of miscarriage / abortion, women staff can avail 2 weeks of Maternity Leave with full pay and spouses are entitled for one week's leave.
- Making efforts to develop infrastructure for childcare facilities in the office premises in order to ensure that the parents can bring their children in circumstances in which the child cannot be taken.

d) **Capacity building for gender sensitization:** We will organize workshops, training programs and discussions for promoting and enabling a gender sensitive work culture. Also, regular trainings will

be conducted on awareness and confidence building of field staff. The workshops would be focusing on men as much as women, with participation of all field functionaries also.

Learnings from past trainings are accessible through meeting minutes or workshop reports of different times, and are available in the library.

- e) Systems against Harassment: Composition of our committee on gender sensitization to address gender issues and concerns is in accordance with committee provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013. Details are given below.
- f) If there is any complaint of male workers carry out any act of violence on women within their families, disciplinary action will be taken as per the rules and scope of work of our Committee.

Staff Policies: All staff policies, rules and regulations shall be gender sensitive and will be reviewed periodically. Some policies that we can presently list out are -

- a) We will ensure that staff access to and use of information technology is gender equitable.
- b) Women employees would be encouraged to take loans to have independent vehicles and be independently mobile. We would also try to make a system that the organizational vehicle is accessed or in-charge of women.
- c) Providing an enabling and friendly work environment where both men and women enjoy and actively participate in work. This includes providing flexible working hours and allowing working from home, wherever possible
- d) Extending work related concessions and relaxations for women staff depending upon the situations and requirements; e.g. providing secure transport facilities when they work late hours; ensuring security measures along with minimum basic facilities for women staff traveling in the field.
- e) Availability of Sanitary napkins in office premises.
- f) Women's well-being – The organization will try to organize retreats for all people, particularly women to be able to rest and recuperate. Team members will be encouraged to attend healing workshops. We shall also try to make changes in our monthly schedules from where women can get a temporary break from their household chores as well as official work and tend to their own desires.
- g) Behavioural - The behavioural expectations from male colleagues as well as women colleagues or people of third gender are such that there is respect and dignity for all involved. The organization will not tolerate any kind of gender abusive language or any form of violence of one on the other. The organization also stands against any kind of stereotyping and our perceptions and informal conversations should be checked for so-called harmless stereotypes around women's abilities, lives, beauty and more.
- h) Stay arrangements would be made for employees and volunteers from outside city till they find something suitable. Nominal charges could be asked of people, as per Core Group's policies on this which will bear in mind the person's paying capacity.

Program Functioning

- o Participation – In all programs, it would be attempted that at least half the participants are women. Special efforts will be made to enhance participation of women/girls in the activities of

- Technical Skills Trainings
- Fellowships amongst girls of vulnerable communities
- Exposure Visits
- Timings for meetings would be decided keeping in mind what would be convenient for women, as per their responsibilities to enhance participation.
- Equal Opportunities – We often need to make an effort to involve women or ensure that women access the limited opportunities that may have been created.
- Preference to vulnerable women in program priorities would be given in the case of any kind of opportunity that is created through a program, as in the nature of livelihoods, fellowships.
- The organization commits to
 - making special efforts to constantly identify vulnerable women and girls and provide them the necessary support and guidance
 - Preference / effort to locate identify women when selecting speakers for programs.
 - Games or theatre or any extracurricular activity would be planned with a gender perspective.
 - Conducting meetings in ways that ensures opportunities and space for women/girls to speak and express and decisions will be taken based on their views.
 - Having women membership and shall attempt to have a majority in all endeavours.
- Gender sensitization training and discussions would be carried out across all program constituencies, children, youth and adults.
- Working amidst denotified tribes, many community members are stuck in jails for long periods of time. This affects the entire family as much as making the detained/arrested woman distraught and vulnerable. But at times, the man outside is not able / does not make the required effort to bring her out. The organization will try to provide legal assistance to ensure women are out on bail as soon as possible. This also applies to situation where a woman may be detained in a police station beyond the permitted time period.
- Support to women in need – this section is applicable to women team members as well as women in the communities we work in.

The office space which functions as the school, hostel and guesthouse will be available for women in need. They can stay here for a period up to a week without any pre-conditions. If they need to stay here further, the situation should be discussed with the Core Group and appropriate assistance would be provided to bring a solution to the problem in hand. The woman may be extended shelter as per need and availability of space.
- The organization will support women in case there is a need to file FIR in cases of sexual violence, domestic violence or any other violence if she so desires and the abuse of rights is of a nature that demands legal action.

Networking– The organization commits to leverage its resources, when possible, and commit to issues of gender justice and gender equity in society. We shall -

- Support women's issues outside our work areas also.
- Initiating and building the advocacy around gender balance and making efforts to integrate gender concerns into the scaling up and mainstream developmental programs

Committee against Sexual Harassment

In Muskaan, there are people working from different backgrounds, ages, sex, caste and social groups (religion, class, tribal). People grow up with the experiences of being of a specific class or gender, and these differences are also transmitted in the relationships that we share with each other, in a work place. There may be someone who is diffident / confident, oppressive/submissive stemming from the position held in larger society by a person of his/her background. These are also personal attributes, and should be modified to create an environment that is safe and positive for everyone.

In this background, there is a committee in the organization to work on promoting an equitable and safe working environment for all people, particularly for socially vulnerable groups like women, Dalits etc. The committee is referred to as the 'Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH)'. The committee has been established with the specific purpose of prevention, prohibition and redressal of cases and incidents of sexual harassment of women at the workplace but in Muskaan its purview has been expanded to address incidents of discriminatory behaviour across gender, caste, class ethnic background etc. as well. Thus, in Muskaan, the committee works with the specific agenda of -

- Creating an environment of equity across and between people of different backgrounds working in Muskaan.
- Responding to specific incidents of discrimination based on power relations including gender, identity, seniority etc.

All team-members working in any capacity in Muskaan could refer their grievances to the Committee. People who are not working in Muskaan, but have any complaint against a person working in Muskaan, could access the Committee. Staff members are expected to bring situations to the committee in such cases and not try to undermine the situation or manage it on their own. For example, if a child or a woman in the basti mentions anything that comes within an 'unacceptable behaviour' or is troubled in any form due to the behaviour of a Muskaan worker, then this should be brought to the CASH by the aggrieved person herself or through the person to whom s/he has mentioned the incident(s). This could also be in relation to a staff member's behaviour with people who are not associated with Muskaan in any way also. For example, if a person working in Muskaan is reported to be sexually harassing a person who may not be part of Muskaan's program areas nor working in the organization, the CASH could initiate a process against the staff member.

On the other hand, if a person working in the organization is being sexually harassed or feels violated on any other grounds from a person who is not working in Muskaan, the aggrieved person could bring the issue in Muskaan, and the organization would take an official stand on the problem.

The Committee will work in accordance to the The **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013**.

Applicability

This policy applies to all regular and contractual staff of [organization]. In case of a complaint as a result of an act by a third party, management will take the necessary preventive and reasonable action to support and assist the affected party.

Reporting

Management will report annually to the Trustees on implementation of this policy.