



Gender Equity Note on the National Policy for Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015

Jennifer Anne Mudge
Senior Expert in Equity of Skill Development
India EU Skills Development Project

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Purpose and Structure

India's Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) was created to fulfill the vision of a 'Skilled India' where human resource development is the primary focus. Among other roles, the MSDE leads in ensuring the implementation of the National Policy for Skill development and Entrepreneurship 2015¹. The MSDE and the National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) face a challenging task in implementing the equity commitments made in the Policy, which include increasing the number of women being skilled, including in non-traditional roles, encouraging women entrepreneurs and working to ensure that workplace and entrepreneurial ecosystems are conducive to women's access and involvement. Though the presence of these commitments is positive, it is not the place of a Policy to detail how such commitments are to be implemented, by whom, within what timeframe, and with what budget. In order that cross-cutting objectives not become lost in the shuffle of wider reform, it is recommended that a Strategy and Action plan be developed through an inter-Ministerial process, led by the NSDA.

The Skills Policy contains both explicit gender references, as well as those where gender would be considered implicit to a reader employing a 'gender lens'. This note aims, among other things, to unpack those issues that technically encompass gender but where this aspect was not fully explored in the Policy, in order to make these aspects visible in any planning or strategy process to follow.

There are a number of social equity commitments made in the 2015 Skills Policy about increasing to the participation of members of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as well as those in geographically remote areas in skilling. Though these are every bit as important to articulate into strategic action planning as gender equity considerations, this paper restricts itself to a consideration of next steps related to gender at this stage, as an entry point to operationalizing cross-cutting policy imperatives.

The **purpose** of this Note is to guide NSDA's consideration about the next steps it would like to take to ensure gender equity in skills (and, ultimately, in the labour market) in India, specifically about *whether and how to pursue the creation of a Gender Strategy and Action Plan to support the implementation and monitoring of commitments made in the 2015 National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship*². The process of developing a Gender Strategy and Action Plan will need to be a proper one, if it is to be done at all. One important aspect will be to convene a **Gender Working Group (GWG)**, the members of which will need to commit time and consistency to the goal of formulating a Gender Strategy intended for official acceptance and implementation. This Note will periodically refer to the GWG as if it already exists, but this is not a foregone conclusion. Again, pursuing a Gender Strategy is one route the NSDA and MSDE should consider, but should not commit to if there is not significant will, expertise and commitment.

This Note is divided into two main sections. **Section 1** analyses the 2015 Skills Policy from a gender perspective as a first step in determining what would need to be done to create a Strategy and Action plan to support it, including identifying some key entry points. **Section 2** looks at strategic and action planning itself (key elements, process and some aspects of how such a Strategy might be structured in relation to India's Skills policy).

¹ Skills Policy, page 43

² Hereafter referred to as the 2015 Skills Policy, Skills Policy or simply the Policy.

Section 1: A gender-focused consideration of the 2015 Skills Policy

Skills and entrepreneurship policy goals related to gender equity³

The 2015 National Policy for Skills Development and Entrepreneurship is a wide-ranging and ambitious document that contains gender equity-related goals related both to skill development and to women's entrepreneurship. It describes a state-of-the-art system (based upon a national qualification framework and informed by a labour market information system) while recognising the challenges inherent in rationalising a traditionally highly complex and not centralised system. The Policy differs from its 2009 predecessor in a number of ways, including:

- It has done away with quotas but still has equity goals (both integrated and stand-alone)
- It deals with issues of access but also with quality
- There is more acknowledgement of the unorganised sector
- A new focus on entrepreneurship
- A new level of focus on skilling workers for a global/overseas market
- A focus on youth (though this group is erroneously treated as homogenous despite the vast differences between the situations of young women and young men as well as between those in urban and remote locales, for example)
- A more specific vision for the use of technology

How the Skills Policy frames gender

The Skills policy contains both **explicit** and **implicit** references to gender both in its discussion of issues to be addressed and in its goals. Where these references are explicit, the NSDA/MSDE's task is to translate them into strategic action points (and, related to that, to budget lines and monitoring strategies as appropriate). The task is somewhat different where the challenges or goals outlined in the Policy do in fact relate to gender, but the gender aspects are not articulated. In this case, the first task is to reach a common understanding on what the challenges, opportunities and goals are with specific reference to gender, and from there to move towards the strategic planning step. The following sections outline where gender is made explicit, as well as those areas where it is highly relevant though not framed as such in the Policy.

Where gender is explicit

Section 2.14 sets out what appears to be the main concern: women constitute almost half of India's 'demographic dividend', yet census data indicates that there has been a continuous fall in women's labour force participation rate from 33.3% to 26.5% in rural areas, and from 17.8% to 15.5% in urban areas between 2004 and 2016. The Policy suggests that **skilling women in non-traditional roles** and **increasing gender sensitivity in the workplace** will have a catalytic effect on productivity and is economically wise. Section 4.11.1 reiterates this point: 'According to Census Data 2001, women account for 48% of the entire population in India. Women have the capability to further drive the economy of the country if their participation in the workforce is increased. With the help of skilling, women can have viable incomes, decent work and be major players who can contribute equally to the economic growth of the country'.

³ This paper, as with the Skills Policy itself, will refer to gender equity and women's empowerment as the same. This is not because men are never marginalized, nor is gender solely about either men or women—in fact, it is based upon an examination of social relations and the balance of power and access to resources between the two. However, because gender analysis of skilling and the situation in India reveals women much more often to be marginalized, the focus in this paper, as in the Skills Policy, is on taking strategic action to involve and empower women.

Section 4.11.2 raises particular skilling concerns and suggests actions: ‘Women’s participation in vocational education and training is especially low as compared to men. **Special mechanisms in the delivery of training** such as mobile training units, flexible afternoon batches, training based on the local needs of the area, will be introduced to ensure participation and mobilization of women. The government will promote **setting up of more training and apprenticeship seats exclusively for women**. Appropriate incentive mechanism will be designed to achieve the same’.

Section 4.11.3 outlines further specific action: ‘Training in non-traditional fields for women will be promoted through the establishment of **specific training programmes that focus on life skills training modules and literacy training**. Apart from that, efforts will be made to increase the pool of **women trainers** and providing them certification by earmarking a certain percentage of intake in training of trainers institutes, for women. **New institutes exclusively for training of women** as trainees and trainers, will also be promoted by Government’.

Section 4.11.4 again outlines specific direction: ‘Women related issues will be incorporated in the **guidelines** for skill training procedures. These could include issues of safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers and equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism’.

Last, Section 4.11.5 mentions action to address the gap between women—even skilled and educated women—and employers in the formal labour market: ‘An **internet or mobile based platform for women employment**, by connecting skilled women and employers, will be promoted. This platform could focus on women willing to re-enter the workforce after a break and those affected by migration’.

Next steps to consider where gender is made explicit

In those sections of the Policy where gender is made explicit and where a solution is proposed, the solution requires unpacking before strategic action planning can begin. The first question to ask is: *do we understand the nature and causes of the problem that the solution is meant to address?*

To take one example from those sections mentioned above: Section 4.11.3 commits that ‘training in non-traditional fields for women will be promoted through the establishment of specific training programmes that focus on life skills training modules and literacy training. Apart from that, efforts will be made to increase the pool of women trainers and providing them certification by earmarking a certain percentage of intake in training of trainers institutes, for women...’. Do we understand the nature and causes of the problem that the solution is meant to address? This solution assumes that providing specific training on life skills and literacy will solve the issue of women’s non-participation in non-traditional training. But have we understood why women do not pursue training usually undertaken by men? The second proposal in this section, having more women trainers, is in line with established good practice for encouraging women students, but will creating a quota resolve the issue in the Indian context? Is the question of why there are so few women trainers in certain fields understood in the first place?

It cannot be overstated how crucial it is to have **qualitative information** to understand the nature of gender-related issues in skilling in India; statistics simply do not tell enough about women's barriers, opportunities, needs and attitudes, nor do they provide answers to crucial 'why' questions. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of qualitative information and analysis on the topic of skilling and entering the labour market. The NSDA, MSDE and GWG will need to determine how best to obtain this type of information, considering that there are existing resources that can be tapped, such as community-based and non-governmental organisations with extensive experience (SEWA would be one example), and also that State and District level institutions and actors exist who could make useful contributions if managed correctly.

When root causes are understood, proposals for change are more likely to succeed. In the case of India, where there is tremendous inter- and intra-state variation in people's circumstances, education levels, mobility and financial resources, these questions must be answered at a very local level, and at least at a State level. Thus another task for the NSDA, MSDE and Gender Working Group is to define, in conjunction with States, what remains to be understood and what solutions are most applicable. District Commissioners may be able to play a useful role here in providing local level information.

When the causes of the issue is understood, the proposed solutions can be analysed and planned. Are the proposed steps the right ones? Who will do what, when, with what budget? What that is not specified will nevertheless need to be incorporated into the implementation of these suggested actions, for example women's lower literacy, stereotypical thinking and assumptions on the part of employers, trainers, assessors, agencies, men and women themselves, women's relative time and financial poverty, women's access to decisionmaking at various stages in her life, women's mobility and access to transportation?

Where gender is relevant, but not made explicit

The term 'gender blind' refers to the absence of gender analysis (and thus gender-responsive measures). Gender-blind policies lead to gender-blind implementation, which reinforces and even exacerbates inequality by not addressing equity and equality.

The Skills Policy is not entirely gender blind, however it stops well short of the needed level of gendered analysis on several key areas where it nevertheless recommends action. In other words, it presents as 'gender neutral' areas where in fact women and men tend to be in quite different positions. While there are those who would read these areas as highly relevant to gender, this is only implied in the Policy, not stated. The risk of such a gap is that implementation is likely to be misguided and gender blind, potentially working against the overall equity ethos of the Policy by reinforcing default inequalities and assumptions. This is something the NSDA, MSDE and GWG will have to correct for in strategic and action planning.

The following are examples of areas where gender is relevant, but not made explicit:

Youth. Young men and women in various parts of India face expectations and have barriers and opportunities that are gender-specific due to social norms. Youth must be understood in a more

gendered, nuanced way to ensure that planning takes account of the particular situation of young women and how it differs from that of young men.

Entrepreneurship. The prevailing gender-blindness of the Entrepreneurship section of Policy is one of its serious weaknesses from an equity perspective. Though the Policy mentions the need to get more women into entrepreneurship and that globally, women are pushed into entrepreneurship due to unemployment, it acknowledges no gendered aspects of entrepreneurship in India, for example what unique barriers and opportunities women in India face in entrepreneurship, why, and what should therefore be done. The GWG must consider what aspects of the entrepreneurship ecosystem—for example access to finance, capital and technology—make it less likely that women entrepreneurs can launch, succeed and grow, and what role does (and can) the formal skilling system have in addressing these elements?

Overseas work. The Policy rightly acknowledges that one impetus for a strong formal skills system is to prepare skilled workers to take advantage of the opportunities of a global workforce. However it does not discuss gendered differences here, though women and men face quite different barriers and have different opportunities when it comes to migrating for work.

Technology. The Policy—and indeed reform of the formal skills system in India—relies on the powerful tool of technology for skills provision, the growth of entrepreneurship, communication, information and ensuring that to strengthen the link between labour market needs and skills supply. However, it does not include a gendered assessment of access to and use of technology in India, nor how gendered differences should be accounted for in implementation planning.

Regional and state-level differences. The Policy is a high-level document, and does not analyse regional, state or local level differences in women’s access to skills, technology, entrepreneurship and the labour market. While this is not surprising given its national-level focus, the role of regional, State and sub-State structures (for example State Ministries and State Skills Development Missions, or SSDMs) as well as their capacity to do gender-responsive planning must be carefully considered in establishing a Strategy. It will be an important task of the Gender Working Group to consider how the NSDA and MSDE can work with State level governments and SSDMs to define the scope of the problems to be addressed, identify strategic implementation and monitoring actions, and allocate roles and responsibility. What will be asked of the States and SSDMs? How can they best contribute to filling information gaps and identifying and implementing strategic action in support of the gender equity goals of the Skills Policy?

Inclusivity. Section 4.10 of the Policy makes a number of commitments to inclusivity. While specific reference is made here to social inclusivity (specifically, to scheduled castes (SCs), other backward classes (OBCs), scheduled tribes (STs), minorities, differently abled persons and those in border, hilly, forested and remote areas. Neither gender nor women is specifically mentioned, but it most certainly a significant factor here; this gap in analysis is one that should be filled, as women belonging to these groups face particular challenges that will need to be addressed to bring them into skilling. The main suggestion is to build facilities in currently underserved areas earmark some training funds, though there is no analysis about what barriers to participation in skilling for these groups (nor, as noted, any gender analysis). The language here in terms of specific goals and activities is vague and will need to be considered from a gender perspective: ‘special attention’ and ‘special efforts’ are the kinds of phrases in policy which get lost in implementation and do not **lend**

Finally, to conclude the preceding discussion of where gender is implicit and explicit in the Skills Policy, it is worth noting that the Policy framework takes its objectives from the starting point of the **Skills India** vision, which itself maps onto the ‘Make in India’ campaign. Within the Policy, there are eleven major paradigms and enablers to achieve objectives of Skill India campaign. Among them, the first makes explicit the mandate to promote skilling among women and several others implicitly encompass a gender-related focus:

- Promotion of skilling among women
- Inclusivity
- Outreach
- Aspiration and advocacy
- Capacity

Next steps to consider where gender is relevant but not made explicit

In this case, the first task for the NSDA, MSDE and GWG is to reach a common understanding of the ways in which the issue is gendered—how are things different for women and men—and from there to move towards identifying what the problem is and strategic and action planning to address it. Some suggestions of gender relevance are made in the section above, though clearly much more information is needed to avoid a scenario where those designing the implementation of the Policy do so in a gender-blind fashion.

Strategic entry points for planning and action

The Policy provides numerous entry points, or opportunities, which if handled strategically can be used to promote women’s involvement and create a skills system that actively promotes gender equity and equality, and which does not fall into the trap of reinforcing stereotypes and assumptions that ultimately limit people’s choices and options. The NSDA, MSDE and GWG should consider how best to use these entry points to design specific strategy and action so that gender equality goals are translated from policy into action.

The table below does not claim to be comprehensive. Rather, it presents some entry points to consider along with brief commentary about possible gender dimensions. It will be the job of the NSDA, MSDE and GWG to determine how to use entry points as they think best.

Entry point	How the GWG might consider using the entry points
System reform elements	
4.1.9 Counseling and guidance	This institutional-level stakeholder presents an excellent entry point that holds multiple potential benefits. If mandated to promote gender equity, guidance counsellors can address their colleagues’ attitudes and practice related to women and equality, address the gap between women and the labour market (including engaging with employers and industry), identify gender-specific gap in skills offerings (for example, are women in need of entrepreneurial and soft skills?), and work with students to address their own gendered prejudices and practice. Guidance and counselling is not a one-way street for information to flow only to students. Counsellors can also provide valuable qualitative and tracking data to their institutions (for example on post-skilling outcomes for women or what encourages them

	to pursue non-traditional skilling, etc) that can in turn be used at District, State and National levels to inform policy and monitoring.
6.7 Re-training and training of instructors	Skills reform involves revising teaching methods. There are ample entry points to integrate a gender equity focus along this process, including eliminating gender stereotypes from training material (and promoting positive images and non-traditional images) and training instructors to promote gender equity in their teaching practice.
2.1, 2.10, 4.1.4, 4.1.5, 4.24, 4.25 and others NSQF	An entry point to consider in the National Skills Qualifications Framework is the fact that the lowest NSQF level is nevertheless at an educational level above that of too many Indian women. The GWG should consider how to extend the NSQF downward to account for those who lack literacy or formal educational attainment.
4.1.7 Government enabling provisions in their contracts for certified, skilled workers	In setting enabling provisions in their own contracts, the Government is in a position to define terms. For example, they could favour certified, skilled women in non-traditional fields in line with the Skills Policy goal of more women in non-traditional areas. Government contracts provide an opportunity to set a standard and model good practice, which can and should involve clear and explicit promotion of gender equity in line with goals stated in its Policy.
4.11.5 Mobile/web-based platforms	Mobile and web-based platforms are often considered as a way to overcome women's restricted mobility and severe dearth of free time. The GWG may wish to consider women's access to and use of these modalities, including how they exclude illiterate women, to determine what strategy is needed to make such platforms as effective as possible in enhancing gender equality in skilling.
Quality benchmarks and awards	There is an opportunity to mandate that quality benchmarks and awards reflect defined standards of gender equality promotion. The GWG and others could work to define what those standards could look like.
4.2.2, 4.2.4, 4.4.8, 4.9.4 Public private partnership (PPP)	There is much analysis of gender in PPPs across disciplines as this model gains traction, and it would be a very strategic area for the GWG to consider. The Policy envisions PPPs as routes to training provision, reaching underserved areas and linking to higher levels of education. However, the structure of PPPs will reinforce current gender equalities if they are not specifically set up to do otherwise. The GWG will need to consider ways in which these can be regulated to promote gender equality, which will involve active engagement with mandates for the structure of public-private agreements.
Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	RPL can be a strategy to reach many of those in the unorganised sector and doing vulnerable work, such as domestic helpers, to access a career path and professional recognition; this group disproportionately includes women. Lessons are emerging already, however, about challenges in getting people to take advantage of RPL that the GWG should heed.
Scholarships, stipends, Skills Vouchers (Sections 4.7.5 and 6.15)	Measures such as these always provide a gender entry point in that a quota can be reserved for girls/women. The NSDA, MSDE and GWG would need to consider what scholarship, stipend and skills voucher schemes have been put in place already, and whether quotas have had any impact on promoting gender equality. Token measures are best avoided, as they give the wrong message: that mainstreaming gender equality means

	ticking a 'box' in which a tiny proportion of women or girls are served.
Industry and Employers	
4.3.14 Employment tracking	The Policy states that 'Employment tracking of individuals for at least one year, post skill training, will be made mandatory under all skill programmes'. Given that women's low participation in the formal labour market even after education and training is holding India back from reaching its potential, employment tracking should be sex-disaggregated at a minimum, and preferably involve the collection of qualitative data that can be used for much-needed gender analysis of the training/employment gap for women.
4.1.6 Industry and apprenticeship	There is significant opportunity in looking at how a gender equity focus can be part of it is' interface with industry to enhance apprenticeship opportunities, which are otherwise likely to at worst leave women out and at best keep them in highly stereotypical areas. Industry is expected to take a lead role in running ITIs through Institute Management Committees (IMCs), which again provides strategic opportunity to integrate a gender focus or mandate (in both the makeup and mandate of IMCs).
Human Resource Mobility Partnerships, institutional arrangements	Any sort of partnership agreement or institutional arrangement provides entry points for integrating a gender equality perspective in the requirements that they set out and how they define and reward success. Doing this in formalised agreements also has the dual benefit of 1) clarity and 2) not leaving implementation up to the goodwill and knowledge of individuals. Caution should be taken that partnerships and institutional arrangements are not used to address gender merely by including arbitrary, unexamined quotas, but that they also include specifics of implementation and monitoring.
4.11.4 Guidelines	An opportunity within skills reform is the production and roll out of new guidelines. For example, the Policy states that 'women related issues will be incorporated in the guidelines for skill training procedures. These could include issues of safe and gender sensitive training environment, employment of women trainers and equity in remuneration, and complaint redressal mechanism'. A good question for the GWG to consider is what should be included in guidelines to <i>empower and maximize women's participation and success</i> in skilling and entrepreneurship? Care should be taken to avoid a 'tickbox' approach where gender is mentioned as a token gesture.
Ecosystem	
4.5.4 Industry mentors	The Policy envisions a system wherein ITIs are tied in with industry mentors, providing critical links in terms of shaping training, counselling, placement, tracking, etc. If left to the default, industry mentor arrangements will continue and possibly enhance existing patterns of participation for women. The GWG could consider how structuring industry mentorships provides opportunity for integrating a specific gender focus.
Promoting entrepreneurship	On one hand, promoting entrepreneurship is a women-friendly aspect of the plan, as it touches upon the large unorganised sector in which so many women are found. As such it provides significant entry points to

	engage with strategic gender planning. However, as stated elsewhere, there is no analysis of how gender and entrepreneurial barriers and opportunities are linked in different parts of India in the Policy and this section could largely be considered gender-blind. The GWG will have a significant task in breaking down what the key issues are and how best to set strategies that work for women to achieve the entrepreneurial goals of the Policy. Barriers such as women having little or no access to finance, land ownership and technology will need to be kept at the forefront of strategic gender planning.
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Attitudinal	
Awareness campaigns, attitude change, increasing support for skills	These intangible elements are mentioned at various points in the Policy, but largely not with specific reference to gender. These intangible elements are a huge part of changing skills reform to be more inclusive and to support gender equality; any Gender Strategy and Action Plan will need to set out very specific ways that entry points related to awareness, attitudes and mindsets about women, skills and the labour market can be effectively addressed.
Training in non-traditional fields	Training women in non-traditional fields is mentioned more than once in the Policy, though there is no analysis of the challenges to doing this, nor the clear rationale for what it will achieve beyond, presumably, that it will create additional pathways for women to become skilled. In fact, there is a clear rationale for pursuing this strategy: women are underrepresented amongst skilled, certified workers in lucrative sectors such as construction, though they do work in such sectors in significant numbers, but in unskilled, vulnerable positions. This is a complex issue but one with which any Gender Policy will have to grapple: where are women currently working that is 'non-traditional'? What barriers exist to them forging reasonable careers in these fields? What discriminatory attitudes have shaped the skills supply side (policies, training, institutions, trainers' attitudes and practices, guidelines, etc) and how may these be addressed? What societal and family barriers exist, and how may these be addressed? What are the views and experiences of employers and sector skills councils, and how might they be addressed to promote women's training in non-traditional fields?
4.1.8 National Skills Awards and participation in international forums	Special events, awards, international fora—these are all entry points through which a focus on gender equality in skills can be introduced, celebrated and discussed. However, this does not happen accidentally, and will need to be articulated in a strategy/action plan.

Key governance, structure and financing institutions for strategy, planning and action

Institutions can play a critical role in enabling gender inequality by replicating and reinforcing the 'default'—that is, conducting business as usual in ways that reinforce an unequal status quo. By the same token, institutions can play a key role in promoting equality by doing things differently. However, there are two crucial elements that need to be in place for this to occur: institutions need

clear **mandates** about reducing inequality and actively promoting equality, and those within institutions need to be **capacitated** to fill those mandates. Without a clear mandate, it is up to the goodwill and initiative of individuals to promote gender equality within that institution's work, which is unsustainable and at best might achieve a few ad hoc and unplanned effects. Likewise, simply laying down a mandate without ensuring that those who will carry it out are capacitated to do so—both in terms of their attitudes and their practice—is more likely to result in an ignored mandate than meaningful action.

It will be necessary for the GWG to identify possible strategic pathways to engage with the mandates and capacity of various institutions on gender equity in skilling. Along the same lines, the GWG would do well to examine and give specific strategic direction to **States' roles, capacity, and responsibilities** to implement actions to realise the gender equity goals set out in the Skills Policy.

The following are some key bodies drawn from the Policy. This list is for GWG consideration and should not be taken as comprehensive:

- MSDE and other Ministries
- SSCs
- NSQF
- NSDC
- SSDMssarah
- HR Mobility Partnerships
- National Skills Research Division
- SSDMs
- Sector Skills Councils and sector skill development plans
- Kaushal Vardhan Kendras (KVKs) at panchayat level
- Excellence centres
- Academies of Excellence

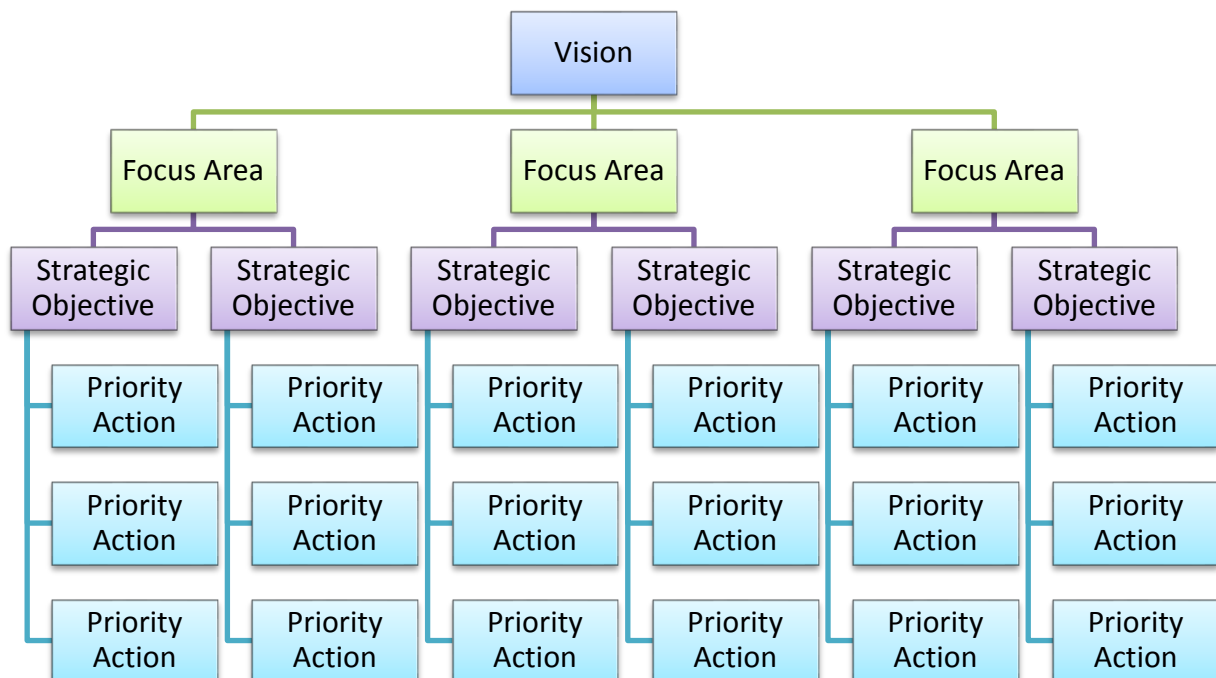
Section 2: Strategy and action planning for gender equity

As set out in the introduction, the NSDA and, by extension, the MSDE are currently considering the feasibility of leading an inter-ministerial process to develop a Gender Strategy and Action Plan to support the implementation, monitoring and realisation of the gender equity-related goals set out in the 2015 Skills Policy. While this would be a valuable process as well as (ideally) yielding a useful Plan—which could go some way towards ensuring that the laudable equity goals set out in the Policy do not evaporate—it is a serious undertaking and due consideration must be given to whether and how this can be done, when, by whom, within what timeframe and with what resources. This Note intends to provide some input to that thinking, but it cannot be considered comprehensive. The final decision must be taken by NSDA/MSDE, who will have to determine the details of the planning process and take it forward.

To assist NSDA’s consideration of embarking upon this worthwhile but demanding task, the following sections discuss crucial elements of developing a strategic plan. There is not one correct, absolute model; the following is presented for consideration.

Elements of a good strategy

Based upon models developed in the business world, one way to conceptualise a good strategy is as a flow chart that reads from top to bottom, with each step being mandatory before going down to the next.



Two points are important to make here. First, although the Gender Strategy requires the development of Vision and Mission statements to anchor the planning process, these should be derived from the 2015 Skills Policy and complement it by fine-tuning the gender equity element. Second, Vision and Mission Statements are not interchangeable or the same. However, the amount

of confusion that can be generated from their relationship to one another means that may actually be more productive to focus on just one from a strategic planning angle. This will be something that NSDA will need to decide at such time as a strategic planning process begins.

For consideration:

A **Mission Statement** concentrates on the *present*; it defines the stakeholders and critical processes and benchmarks desired levels of performance.

The **Vision Statement** focuses on the *future*, and is a source of inspiration and motivation. In the case of skilling in India, a good, gendered vision statement will describe a changed skilling and labour industry within the context of a more equitable Indian society.

The Gender Strategy planning should begin with defining a Vision Statement that echoes the 2015 Skills Policy (and Skill India) vision, but with an articulated gender perspective. A vision statement is a good place to begin the strategic planning process as it provides an ‘anchor’ to stop planners from getting ‘lost at sea’. Everything that is written into the strategy from this point onwards should help to get closer to the Vision.

What is a Strategic Objective?

A Strategic Objective is a specific goal, with a clearly stated outcome and a deadline. It differs from a Focus Area in that it is specific and measurable, and once completed will be replaced by another, different goal. It is something that can be tangibly achieved.

How many Strategic Objectives should there be?

This is an important balance to get right. If there are too few, little will be accomplished, but too many are likely to result in some not being accomplished—which should absolutely be the intention of a Gender Strategy. Having two Strategic Objectives per Focus Area would be a suggested starting point.

A challenge with gender strategy development is to get the aspirational piece right. Looking at the status quo, it can be easy to conclude that change is not possible because things ‘are as they are’. In this case, it is not likely that meaningful goals and objectives will be set. Likewise, aiming for unrealistic or overnight change will result in setting goals and objectives that are too lofty. The key is to think strategically about what is realistic, while bearing in mind that the Strategy is about change, the mandate for which is clearly laid out in Government policy.

How Should I Structure a Strategic Objective?

The main advice here is to keep things simple. Strategic Objectives should be easy to remember and should be understandable by everyone within the organisation. That means avoiding jargon and keeping them to one sentence long. More detail can be added, but it should be possible to sum up the intended achievement quickly and simply.

A useful structure for a strategic objective is: Action + Detail + Metric⁴ + Unit + Deadline

So, an example might be something like:

Create two women’s apprenticeship schemes in one non-traditional field by January 2018.

⁴ Standards of measurement by which efficiency, performance, progress, or quality of a plan, process, or product can be assessed

Part of the purpose of the GWG is to involve people early and create 'buy in' and shared vision amongst those who with gender expertise and those who represent agencies who can actually authorise and take specific actions forward.

Priority Actions

Once a Vision, Focus areas and Strategic Objectives are set (and drawn from the Policy), the GWG should outline priority actions that form the basis of an Action Plan; these should then be linked to a specific timeframe and to responsible parties. There may be quite a few priority actions under each Strategic Objective, depending upon what is needed to accomplish it.

Section 3: Conclusions and next steps for NSDA

Key Stakeholders: Gender Working Group (GWG)

The process of developing a Gender Strategy and Action Plan will need to be a proper one, if it is to be done at all. One important aspect will be to convene a Gender Working Group (GWG), the members of which will need to commit consistency and to the goal of formulating a Gender Strategy intended for official acceptance and implementation.

The following are just some suggested GWG members:

National government

1. Chaired by NSDA/MSDE
2. Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
3. Ministry of Rural Development
4. Ministry of Tribal Affairs
5. Ministry of Social Justice
6. Ministry of Medium and Small Enterprise
7. Youth Ministry
8. NSDC
9. DGET
10. MOLE

Partner Agencies

1. ILO
2. ADB

NGOs

1. SEWA

Academics and leading thinkers

1. Institute for Human Development
2. Feminist Economist group members

NSDA should examine, reflect upon and add to or subtract from this suggested list as it sees fit.

The NSDA/MSDE and GWG will need to consider what sources of regional, state and sub-state⁵ level information will be involved and will need to define roles and responsibilities at the state level and for various institutions. There is a critical need for qualitative information in addition to summary statistics, to understand why women do or do not make various choices and what people's attitudes are, before blindly applying quotas or strategies that fail to meet people's needs or reflect their realities.

Proposed process

Good planning is the optimal combination of 'top-down' and 'bottom up'. Information about needs, barriers, capacities, innovations and social norms must come from the lowest levels and flow upwards in order to inform planning. Without this, planners rely on assumptions, their own (necessarily limited) sets of experiences and sets of broad statistics that invariably mask inequalities and yield few or no insights as to what women, in particular, need and have to offer. At the same time, there is a role for planners at the top to create 'space' and support for reform that takes the people's experiences, needs and capabilities into account.

NSDA could choose one of two routes to develop a Gender Equity Strategy for skills and entrepreneurship: begin at the State level, or begin at the National level. While the former is more informative, it is much more involved. And while the latter is potentially more do-able for a set of

⁵ Such as District Commissioners

already-stretched NSDA Consultants, it risks being out of touch with ground realities and blunt to regional and state level differences.

Next Steps

NSDA Consultants and leadership should consider whether, when and how it wants to lead on the process of formulating a Gender Strategy and Action Plan. If a decision to attempt a Gender Strategy and Action plan is taken, the following are recommended:

Approach the ILO for potential support to the process. The ILO has experience of supporting a gender-responsive Skills policy and strategy creation in Bangladesh and has in the past expressed its potential willingness to provide support for a similar initiative in India.

Senior NSDA/MSDE leadership should urge all concerned Ministries to appoint one person to follow the Strategy process all the way through with no substitutions or changes along the way. This would avoid the common issue of different people being sent to working group meetings at different stages, which lessens the quality of their inputs. In return, the NSDA/MSDE should make a firm, public commitment that it will set dates for working group meetings not less than three weeks in advance.

Consultants at NSDA are short of time and lack written job descriptions to inform their roles. If the process of developing a Gender Strategy is to go forward, **each NSDA Consultant should have a written mandate about her or his expected involvement** in it. This may be a matter of a brief memo directing Consultants how to support with the Ministries under each of their remits, what information to gather from his/her respective States and whether her/his presence will be required at GWG meetings.

Last, two general observations: at the time of writing, it is understood that NSDA is taking on additional staff. Ideally, there would be one and at least two people on full time staff who have gender and social equity experience and a specific mandate, with one of those people appointed specifically as a gender consultant. Similarly, MSDE does not have dedicated in-house gender expertise or a focal person with a technical gender speciality, though this would be a critical institutional element to put into place if the equity goals of the Skills Policy are to be pursued in any meaningful way. It has clearly been shown that there are significant policy level commitments to gender equality in skilling in India, however without making it someone's job to give specific shape to strategic planning and implementation on gender, it will otherwise depend upon whether or not someone has gender on her or his 'radar' and takes the initiative to do it.