

# Gender Policy

## Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices

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### Setting the context

Gender inequalities are wide, spanning from discrimination of women and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) groups to organised violence and preventing opportunities for their development and wellbeing. Narrowing down to the context of a workspace, the inequalities range from gender gap in wages, exploitation, harassment, discrimination and preventing or denying opportunities for growth. Equity-based gender systems bring together social justice, economic justice, human rights and sustainable development on the same platform. With road maps being created for 2030 for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender equity is viewed as an important tool for achieving several goals and targets under it.

There are emerging discussions simultaneously on rethinking the concept of gender as a binary and to consider the same as a spectrum of identities including transgender and other sexual minorities. The Rights of Transgender Person's Bill, 2015 is reflective of the inclusion of gender in drafting policies in India on a wider spectrum than the conventional understanding.

Some examples of gender inequality follow: Women, Business and Law (2015)<sup>1</sup> by World Bank asserts that, among 173 countries, 100 have legal restriction on women's employment. Women are barred from working in certain factory jobs in 41 economies; in 29 economies they are prohibited from working at night; and in 18 economies they cannot get a job without permission from their husband. Data related to the other gender groups are further reflective of the exclusionary and marginalising practices prevalent in a workspace. Praxis studies with transgenders (TGs) in the state of Tamil Nadu reveals that out of 522 people, only 2 per cent were self-employed; 12 per cent were in the private sector which included dancing at functions and working in shops; while a majority resorted to sex work and begging. This was largely attributable to discrimination transgenders were facing due to their identity.<sup>2</sup>

### Gender Policy for Praxis: Institute for Participatory Practices

The Constitution of India guarantees through the preamble, the Fundamental Rights and Duties and Directive Principles of the State policy, the right to equality for all its citizens. Article 14 and 15 (3) of the Indian Constitution provides equal status to women and empowers the state to take affirmative action in favour of women. Though unenforceable, Article 39 (a) and (d) guide the state to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)). The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, adopted in 2001, aims to bring about advancement, development and empowerment of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their participation in all spheres of public life and activities.

India as a signatory to the UN Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1979) provides for realising equality between women and men by ensuring women's equal access to, and opportunities in, political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election, as well as education, health and employment.

However, there are visible inequalities and gaps in terms of their implementation and practice in India. The *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* Report By UN Women said that in India, women doing unpaid work is 7 times more than men.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wbl.worldbank.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Intersectionality Framework to Track Budgets for Transgender Communities in Tamil Nadu

<sup>3</sup> Progress of the World's Women, 2015-16

Goal 5 of the recently drafted Sustainable Development Goals emphasises achieving gender equality and empowerment of all girls and women. The targets for the same include, among other things, an end to all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices against all women and girls everywhere; recognition and value to unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies; full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life; and reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

As an organisation whose mission is to strive for the democratisation of development processes and institutions and to ensure that the voices of poor men, women, transgenders, girls and boys are heard and acted upon, Praxis is committed to principles of gender equality. Taking note of national and international guidelines and precedents, the gender policy of Praxis is inclusive. It seeks to bring together the guidelines, procedures and frameworks in to ensure gender equality and equity.

### **Relevant Governing Principles of Praxis**

- Gender equity is non-negotiable. All references to development/participatory processes mean gender equitable development/participatory processes.
- De-centralisation of power and local self-governance are important cornerstones of a truly participatory democracy. It is imperative that the process of gender equitable decentralisation be actively encouraged and institutions of grassroots democracy and local self-governments (such as Panchayati Raj institutions in the Indian context) be strengthened to be democratic to the core.

### **Key Concepts to understand the policy:**

1. Gender: Gender is a fluid terminology existing in a continuum; gender involves social norms, attitudes and activities. Gender is beyond the physical attributes and binaries of a man, women and transgender. It is a spectrum.
2. Gender Equality: Refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities to gender identities
3. Gender policy is a term that describes policies, standards, systems, guidelines and procedures that seek to ensure gender equality.
4. Gender equity: Equity relates to fairness, justice and other societal norms that give expression to the best aspirations of our collective social conscience.<sup>4</sup> It is associated with opportunities and social justice. Gender equity refers to a process of allocating resources, programs and decision making for men, women and trans-genders.

The primary objective of recruitment and selection in Praxis is to ensure high standards of competence, while providing equal opportunities to all applicants. Praxis ensures providing a safe and healthy environment for all employees, especially women and sexual minorities. The policies and norms detailed below have been specifically created and compiled for this purpose.

## **Human Resources**

### **1. Recruitment**

- Praxis encourages women and transgender candidates to apply for all vacancies announced.
- A panel with at least one woman is part of the selection process for all applicants.
- Formal Orientation/ Induction about gender: Given the importance of gender friendly environment, the office conducts a formal orientation or induction programme for newcomers. Gender is quite a broad concept that affects everyone in their day-to-day life. Though there are several instances of informal discussions on gender and other related aspects of it, there is a requirement for initial training on gender sensitization for newcomers, especially those who come from different backgrounds. The time to build perspective and overcoming from reservation/inhibitions is different for different set of

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<sup>4</sup> Sen, A. K. (1998). Economic policy and equity: an overview. International Monetary Fund.



people. So, continuous efforts should be made on a more regular formal basis. These formal discussions should be documented for further reference.

## **2. Career**

The women staff may avail of a “maternity career break” of up to two years if she has been a staff of Praxis for at least three continuous years. No salary would be paid during this period, however, her employment continuity in Praxis will be protected. On her return, she may be offered a similar position, on similar terms to what was applicable at the time of her proceeding on maternity break. (For more details please refer to HR Manual Chapter-VI, Number-7D)

## **Benefits**

### **1. Housing/ House Rent Allowance**

Praxis will lease accommodation for staff, if necessary, subject to a ceiling on monthly rent of 40% basic salary. Single women will be entitled to this benefit on priority as Praxis recognises that it is more difficult for them to find safe and secure accommodation. (For more details, please refer to HR Manual Chapter-IV, number 4)

### **2. Leave**

- **Special leave:** Women employees are entitled for special leave at the rate of half-day per month. This includes women staff on probation as well.

- **Maternity Leave:**

All maternity benefits will also be applicable to parents of the adopted children and to parents of children under legal guardianship.


- Women staff are entitled to maternity leave up to four months with full pay and two months with half pay at one stretch. Such leave could be availed before and/or after delivery of her child. Such leave could be availed in combination with earned leave.
- An amount of Rs. 6000/- (equivalent to the normal annual medical reimbursement entitlement) can be claimed as reimbursement towards maternity expenses against bills. Claims in this respect can be made either before or after the delivery, but within three months of delivery. This facility is available to all staff (women staff as well as male staff – for expenses incurred for the spouse’s maternity). The reimbursement will not be available if the staff member is covered by insurance for the purpose.
- The aforesaid facilities shall be available to staff in the permanent category. In the case of staff on probation the period of probation shall stand extended to the extent of maternity leave availed of during the period of probation.
- For the purposes of meeting with the contingencies of MTP or spontaneous miscarriage, women staff would be:
  - Granted up to three weeks leave with full pay based on recommendation of medical doctor. Such requests need to be supported by a medical certificate.
  - Reimbursed medical expenses for covering the above said contingencies up to a maximum limit of Rs.1500/- against bills.
- Male staff, within the first month of becoming a father, may avail of paternity leave up to a maximum of 15 days including Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

- **Formalising leave entitlements for informal support staff**

The provided number of leaves to the informal support staff is on understanding and negotiation basis. To ensure office friendly environment for informal support staff, their basic entitlements needs to be taken care of. For example - provision of having a specified number of leaves monthly as well as annually and provision of accumulative leaves for informal support staff. Particularly, for informal female staff there should be provision of one leave in every month.

### **3. Working hours**

- Praxis offers flexible working hours for employees. Women staff with children up to 3 years of age will work the same number of hours as others, but can adjust their office timings by up to one hour.
- Provision of mercy hour to employees with children (0-2 years)



The provision of mercy hours (liberty of 1-2 hours) can be considered for both male and female employees. A certain time limit (in number of hours and number of days) can be set aside.

#### **4. Ensuring a healthy and safer working environment**

- There are separate toilets for men and women and a basic first aid and medical kit in all Praxis offices
- Under exceptional circumstances where women staff members are required to work late, it shall be the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that the women reach their residence safely escorted.
- In such cases where official transport is not available to a female employee, the line manager will ensure that the female employee reaches home safely and if required the female employee is escorted by a reliable individual and expenses incurred on transport and escort will be born by the organisation.

**Note:** It is often challenging for administration to follow the norms because there is a possibility that the female employee may feel the provision to be disempowering for them.

#### **5. Travel**

- While Praxis is committed to ensuring the safety of all staff, additional precautions would be taken for women. In this regard, the timing of the travel to and from a city will be booked keeping in mind the location of, access to and safety of commuting to the airport/railway station/bus terminus.
- The staff shall be consulted before the tickets are booked as far as possible to avoid inconvenience.
- There will be the option of shifting from a previously booked accommodation in case the female staff feels it can be a threat to life or safety. This change shall be executed after consulting with the Project Coordinator of the concerned project or the line manager.
- Precautions will be taken for women such as reliable transport arrangements from the airport, railway station, bus stand and booking them in safe hotels.

#### **Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy**

While this policy sets forth our goals of promoting a workplace that is free of sexual harassment, the policy is not designed or intended to limit the authority of Praxis to discipline or take remedial action for workplace conduct which we deem unacceptable, regardless of whether that conduct satisfies the definition of sexual harassment.

#### **Provision of crèche**

Each office can have the provision of crèche. Either the office could think of having its own crèche or association with some private crèche for the employees in a nearby location of office area can be worked out.

