

Gender Mainstreaming Report and Action Plan 2022-2027

MARCH 28, 2022

Oorja Development Solutions India Pvt. Ltd.



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About Oorja

Oorja Development Solutions is a farming as a service (FaaS) company registered in the UK and India and incorporated in 2016. It works at the intersection of renewable energy and sustainable agriculture. Oorja focuses on replacing polluting diesel engines used along the agricultural value chain with solar-powered productive appliances such as solar irrigation pumps, agro-processing mills, and decentralized cold storages. Oorja currently works with small and marginal farmers in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Farmers in these regions operate on uneconomical landholdings of fewer than 2 acres and often lack access to technology, agricultural inputs, tools and markets. Some groups, such as women farmers, are particularly marginalised and vulnerable to economic shocks and climate change due to their gender.

Oorja employs an innovative pay-per-use business model to bring clean energy within the reach of small and marginal farmers by bridging the investment gap in yield-enhancing solar technology for the farm. A group of farmers can take these services and pay affordable tariffs according to their consumption, without any up-front cost for technology acquisition. Oorja has so far launched solar-powered farming services in three energy verticals: Oonnati (irrigation-as-a-service), Oojjwal (milling-as-a-service), and Oonnayan (cooling-as-a-service). The affordable and reliable farming services have positively impacted the lives of 6,500+ smallholder farmers and have resulted in saving 488 tons of CO₂eq emissions in the atmosphere to date.



Vision

Oorja’s vision is to create economic opportunity, improve the standard of living, and combat climate change in rural agrarian communities.

Mission

Oorja’s mission is to empower 10 million farmers globally by 2030 with the agricultural solutions they need to sustainably increase their income, reduce energy costs, boost agricultural productivity and combat climate change and enhance their quality of life.

Strategic Context

Nearly 75% of the economically active women in India are engaged in agriculture, out of which one-third are cultivators and around half are agricultural laborers. The agricultural sector in India contributes to 14% of the GDP and is an essential source of economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, and food security. Women farmers are involved at every stage of agriculture, from crop production to harvesting to management, and are involved in the production of 60-80% of India’s food, thus forming the economic backbone of the rural community.

Though women farmers play a visible role in agriculture, they face a variety of obstacles and constraints as compared to their male counterparts. With an increase in the migration of men from rural areas to urban centers in search of better livelihood opportunities, women farmers face additional challenges of managing the work burden of both on-farm and off-farm productive activities. Despite an increase in the feminisation of agriculture, women farmers still lack access to land rights, training, and extension services, and have limited access to resources and finance, farm machinery, and new technology. Additionally, while 13% of women farmers own their own land, the situation is even more worrisome in states like Bihar where only 7% of women have land rights. Lack of land rights and inequality in landholding put women farmers in more disadvantaged situations, as these are critical for them to access credit from banks either to invest in new technologies or buy farm machinery. Further, women farmers also lack access to inputs, improved variety of seeds, fertilisers, and knowledge to implement better agricultural practices. This disparity in access leaves women farmers with a low income from farming, low agricultural productivity, and an increasing knowledge gap.

Oorja performed a gender gap analysis in its key practices and operations. Some of the major barriers that were faced by women farmers were identified as below:

Pervasive cultural and social norms

- Cultural and social norms influence women’s agency in the community and household. Within the family, decision-making power tends to be balanced, and women are empowered to make decisions that relate to the household, especially when it comes to managing family matters. However, women are significantly less visible in the community.
- In the current geographical area of Oorja’s operation, this is more evident as social and cultural norms are highly patriarchal, limiting women’s agency, making it harder for women to fully express their potential and making them less able to voice their opinions and concerns, especially outside household matters.
- Another area of concern identified is security for women farmers, which impacts their ability to work and limits them to a certain type of job roles, especially when the job requires traveling to different locations outside of their home or village.

Limited access to resources and finance

- In Oorja's areas of operation, inherent gender bias in the economic system limits women smallholder farmer access to credit due to lack of land rights. It has been observed that the cultural norms and lack of collateral often prevent women from borrowing money and without adequate funds for capital investments, female farmers are less likely than men to buy and use fertilisers and drought-resistant seeds, farm implements, and other advanced farming tools and techniques that increase crop yields.
- Entrenched gender roles prevent women farmers from selling their crops at the market or leave their villages after a certain time.
- Women farmers also face challenges of lower literacy, digital and financial literacy, in addition to limited access to finance. Within the family, women are empowered to make day-to-day financial decisions for the family but have less decision-making power with more substantial expenses and farming.

Lower Educational Level

- Women in BoP communities tend to fall short behind other women in terms of education and have more limited access to information, training, and upskilling opportunities due to more limited technical knowledge than men.

95% of Oorja's current beneficiaries - as determined by membership records, not usage records - are male farmers. The barriers mentioned above and other factors related to pervasive cultural and social norms, have limited Oorja's reach among women as end-users and obstructed the company's efforts to hire women in various field-based positions, such as collection agents, field assistants, or operators. Due to the company's mission and objectives to promote gender equity, Oorja seeks to enhance the representation of women among its customer base by better targeting the needs of women farmers and female-headed households. To strengthen the food system, it is imperative to provide women farmers with a level playing field as compared to their male counterparts, so that they can have agency in society and move upward in the economic ladder.

Working closely with women farmers and employees will allow Oorja to build a closer relationship with the communities we work in and introduce new services or adapt its services to better meet the needs of women as customers. To achieve the goal of promoting sustainable agriculture, addressing gender inequality is essential due to women's key role in the agricultural value chain. From a business returns perspective, women form an additional customer segment that can drive revenues and will

help Oorja scale its operations in existing geographies. Further, having organisational-level policies and strategies that are geared towards empowering women, recruiting and retaining them as employees, is not only tied to risk mitigation but also to increased organisational accountability, performance, and reputation.

Through this Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan, Oorja endeavors to bridge the gender equity gap in the agricultural value chain.

“Oorja's vision is to integrate women along the entire value chain of its operations as customers, employees, and train women farmers on sustainable agricultural practices to have agency in their community and uplift their economic well-being”.

Implementation

Oorja is taking a transdisciplinary, multi-systems approach to gender mainstreaming. It will focus on strengthening how we understand and respond to gender and inclusion within the rapidly changing food system and in Oorja's operational areas, and how we can integrate climate resilience strategies and new forms of digital literacy and impact the last mile communities. We believe that agricultural development will not be possible until the gender gap is reduced. Additionally, supporting gender equality is expected to have direct benefits for Oorja such as positive ROI, revenue generation, and increased organisational performance and reputation in the communities we serve.

A gender mainstreaming team has been established to oversee the implementation of the gender mainstreaming work at Oorja. The team will be responsible for researching the gender gaps within the organisation and in the agricultural value chain and designing strategic interventions to bridge this gap. This will involve identifying and mapping critical gender and inclusion knowledge gaps through research and engagement with the farming community, grassroots stakeholders, and understanding of key data bottlenecks and biases that lead to persistent inequalities.

Further, we will facilitate capacity strengthening and change processes, leading to a more gender-equal and inclusive workforce and business. We will incorporate innovative tools and methods to better analyse and interpret patterns of change at different levels, and identify the most appropriate interventions to support more inclusive and diverse communities. We will be working with strategic partners to better leverage their knowledge, outreach to support innovations that are more inclusive. The team will monitor the progress based on the indicators and measures of success designed and provide an annual report to the management and share the KPI achieved with investors.

Strategic Framework

This Gender Mainstreaming Report and Action Plan 2022-2027 outlines a framework to assist Oorja in developing and implementing effective strategies around reaching women lead farmers and creating

a conducive workplace culture, leadership and employment practices to improve gender equality within the organisation at the head office and field level. This Strategy and Action Plan acknowledges the diverse background of people that work with Oorja and the farming communities Oorja is working with and recognizes the different lived experiences and challenges faced by women farmers.

The report will outline three goals for Oorja to focus on in the immediate future and over the next five years to achieve gender mainstreaming and minimise the gender gaps in agriculture and better serve female customers and users. The recommendations in this report on gender integration strategies also aim to enhance Oorja's understanding of the current needs of smallholder women farmers and the barriers they face. Secondly, the report will also equip the company in reaching out to female stakeholders (as end-users or indirect beneficiaries), providing them with the right opportunities and training to boost their agricultural productivity and provide them with additional technical, business and numeracy skills to improve their job prospects and livelihoods.

Oorja aims to achieve below three goals for gender mainstreaming in the immediate future, short and long term:



Increase the proportion of women as customers and end-users



Create local jobs for rural women



Build a gender-balanced organisation

Goal 1: To INCREASE THE PROPORTION OF WOMEN AS CUSTOMERS AND END-USERS

To bring the benefits of access to clean energy services to more women, Oorja aims to increase its customer base among women smallholder farmers and to target women-led households. According to membership and sales records, Oorja’s current base of female farmers is around 5% of total customers. This may be under-representative of the actual reach among women farmers, as in many cases male household members register their name as the *member* (primary user) but the actual service *user* may also be their female family member. To date, a targeted strategy has not been adopted to reach more women-headed households for Oonnati, Oojjwal, and Oonnayan services.

Through Goal 1, Oorja endeavors to target lead women farmers as a separate category of customers. This is likely to increase the representation of women farmers in Oorja's customer base and to encourage women from male-headed households to engage better with Oorja. Working with women allows for a more reliable relationship with the community which will strengthen business prospects for new services to be introduced in the future.

Strategy 1: To increase the representation of women in the customer base of Oorja’s agri-energy services to 20% by 2022 and to 30% by 2027, from the current level of 5%, by targeting women lead farmers and women-led households to understand their specific needs.

Oorja will identify women lead farmers through village surveys, women-only focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews. This will also entail providing these women farmers with appropriate or customised services for irrigation, milling and cooling.

The key activities Oorja may work on are :

- 1) Including women-centric questions in existing surveys / questionnaires and including analysis of gender-related barriers and needs in FGDs, individual demand assessments, and impact evaluations.
- 2) Identifying and targeting women farmers and women-led households in the areas of Oorja’s existing operations and in new geographies through surveys, both FGDs and individual demand assessment surveys.
- 3) Hiring and training female employees within the ground team to work on customer acquisition and providing them targets to attract more women farmers as customers.
- 4) Modifying the current sales and market strategy to better target women farmers by catering to their specific needs.
- 5) Working with state rural livelihood missions and NGOs that are already working with women farmers to help with outreach to them.

- 6) Holding workshop sessions for women farmers on how access to Oorja’s reliable irrigation, milling and cooling services can help them increase their crop yield, productivity, and income from farming.
- 7) Sensitizing all field staff to understand and identify needs of women users in general.

Indicators

- Proportion of female farmers as registered members or customers (direct end-users) paying for Oorja’s services, for all the three services (Oonnati, Oojjwal, and Oonnayan) individually and cumulatively.
- Number of female employees working at Oorja at the community level, including as Operators, collection agents, site assistants, field and project assistants.
- Proportion of sales of energy services contributed by female farmers and women-led households.
- Number of women farmers trained on sustainable and modern agricultural practices, for instance crop diversification, intensification of crop yields, etc.
- Change in crop intensity for women farmers.
- Change in agricultural yields for women farmers.
- Change in agricultural income for women farmers.
- Change in sales or revenues from women farmers as a proportion of total revenues of the company.

Baseline

In the immediate future (2022), Oorja will consider:

- Publishing Oorja’s Gender Mainstreaming baseline report around gender equality to demonstrate key challenges and barriers to gender equity in the agricultural context, Oorja’s operations and workplace.
- Developing an internal guidance document on the best practices for integrating gender into governance and decision-making processes and training staff and the leadership team on these processes.
- Forming a Gender Mainstreaming Community of Practice (COP) that facilitates cross-learning (e.g. training, learning events), exchange of good practices among partners on gender policies, strategies, and business benefits around working on gender equality.
- Facilitating partner connections to implement projects on the ground that impact women farmers by collaborating with women’s self-help groups (SHGs) and women-centric NGOs.

Target	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in the proportion of women customers from 5% to 30% 	From 2022 to 2027
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in agricultural income of women farmers by 30-50% 	From 2022 to 2027
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in revenue for the company from women customers by 15-30% 	From 2022 to 2027

Owner

The person responsible to track the developments for Goal 1 will be the Sales Manager and the KPI/Impact metrics to be reported to the senior management on a quarterly and annual basis. The Sales Manager will be expected to integrate the sales report from women customers into the current sales/business report and share this with the senior management.

Goal 2: To CREATE LOCAL JOBS FOR RURAL WOMEN

To bring the benefits of solar technology and empower women smallholder farmers to gain knowledge, increase their financial and educational capacity and acquire agency in the community, Oorja launched its flagship “Krishi Sakhi Program”.

Krishi Sakhis, literally meaning ‘friends of agriculture, will be rural women who will receive training on sustainable agriculture practices and other business and digital literacy skills that will help them to gain confidence, become more employable, and increase their income. After gaining the requisite skillsets and gaining agency and economic independence they will act further as change-makers in their community by inspiring other women. Oorja will initially conduct capacity-building workshops for women customers and spouses of male customers. The company will also endeavor to directly employ some Krishi Sakhis after training. This will empower women to move up the energy ladder from users of energy sources to implementers and eventually decision-makers. This training will also help women farmers break the current barriers they face in adopting clean technology and taking decisions around it. Women farmers will play a more active role in their communities and consequently facilitate a gradual shift in the social and cultural norms.

Through the Krishi Sakhi Program pilot launched in 2022, Oorja endeavors:

- To train 500 smallholder farmers in modern and sustainable agronomic practices.
- To train 10-50 willing Krishi Sakhis on digital literacy, financial and agri-business management, linking to markets and institutional buyers, as well as agronomy and new agronomic techniques. These women will receive agricultural inputs (seeds and fertilisers) for one season and agronomy training. Krishi Sakhis will also be trained on a broad curriculum covering financial and digital literacy, operations of solar pumps, mills and cold storages, repair of solar appliances, and sales and payment collections.
- To employ 10-50 trained Krishi Sakhis in various field-based roles such as collection agents, operators, and service agents and as part-time field agents selling agri inputs and solar appliances, giving them agency and an opportunity to be economically independent. Furthermore, the women will be trained in operations and maintenance of solar assets and as collection and service agents.

Through this program and subsequent iterations, Oorja aims to build the capacity of farmers in Oorja’s operational districts with an emphasis on female farmers, to improve their agricultural productivity and income, and provide them with knowledge on how to best leverage productive use technologies powered by solar.

The area of intervention will initially be Bahraich and Shravasti districts, Uttar Pradesh, India. The incubation program will be conducted in two phases: Phase I will run from February to March 2022, and Phase II will run from March to April 2022.

Strategy 1: Organise training sessions in the village on agronomy and sustainable agricultural practices to boost smallholder farmers' (including women farmers') crop yields by 30% or more.

In Phase I of the program, both female and male smallholder farmers will be trained on modern scientifically based agronomic practices. This will include the following activities:

- 1) **Advertisement:** Advertising the training opportunity in select villages of Oorja's operations for the existing customer base as well as non-customers to mobilise farmers and bring awareness about Oorja's Krishi Sakhi program. Provide women farmers information about the program and inform them how they can sign up after participating in the agronomy training in Phase I. This will be done through door to door campaigns, distribution of pamphlets / flyers and promotional banners in the villages.
- 2) **Sign-up process:** Signing up interested farmers for the training program through a sign-up form which will also provide data to understand their current agricultural practices, interest level to participate in the training program, and women farmers' interest in being trained as Krishi Sakhis.
- 3) **Focus group discussions:** To bring awareness among male and female farmer groups about the Krishi Sakhi training program, focus group discussions using semi-structured questionnaires will be held in select villages with customer and non-customers groups of 15-30 women farmers in order to understand their interest to participate in the training program and their current challenges and agricultural practices.
- 4) **Workshops and training sessions:** A trained agronomist will conduct training workshops, classroom sessions, and field demonstrations for farmers who have signed up. These workshops will include training both male and female participants. They will be trained on agronomy and sustainable agronomic practices, yield improvement, new agronomic techniques to increase the productivity of land, agri-business management, and other topics. The ultimate aim will be to provide them knowledge, skills and tools to boost their crop yields and generate higher income from farming and improve their economic well-being. A total of 15 training sessions will be conducted in which around 30 training modules have been developed in-house. Examples include how to cultivate new crops such as peppermint and okra, how to increase yields from staple crops such as through the SRI method of cultivating paddy, and growing kitchen vegetable gardens.
- 5) **Gender sensitisation training:** Oorja will conduct sensitisation training for male farmers as well to effect faster change. This will be done by creating a gender training module for agronomic training where men can be exposed to the idea of working together with their spouses for better incomes.

In the Phase II of the program, Oorja will provide training to interested female lead farmers, female spouses of male customers, and female spouses of non-customers. All women farmers having participated in Phase I will be invited to enroll in Phase II, as well as other interested women farmers.

Strategy 2: Provide women farmers and rural women with free quality agricultural inputs and on-field demonstration for the cultivation of high-value crops to help them earn additional income from farming.

Strategy 3: Build the technical capacity of rural women by providing them with digital, numerical and financial literacy training.

The key activities will include:

- 1) **Sign-up process:** Signing up interested women farmers that indicated their interest in the Krishi Sakhi training in Phase I of the program will be reached out to for the training. Other women (for instance, women customers, female spouses of Oorja's male customers, female spouses of non-customers) will also be offered to participate in the Krishi Sakhi program regardless of their participation in Phase I.
- 2) **Focus group discussions:** To bring awareness among female farmer groups about the Krishi Sakhi training program, focus group discussions using semi-structured questionnaires will be held in select villages with customers and non-customer groups of 15-30 women farmers to understand their interest to participate in the training program and what would be the most suitable topics for them based on their interest, education level and current skillsets. Further, information regarding the current challenges they face due to lack of access to digital technology, lack of skills including digital literacy, business skills, agricultural knowledge, etc will also be collected.
- 3) **Distribution of quality inputs:** The selected Krishi Sakhis will be provided with free quality agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers during the training program.
- 4) **Agricultural training:** Krishi Sakhis will be trained on sustainable agriculture practices, yield enhancement and market linkages. They will also receive on-field demonstration of how to grow high-value and new crops such as maize, sugarcane, peppermint or other crops suited to the local climate in order to increase their agricultural income.
- 5) **Digital literacy training:** Krishi Sakhis will be trained on how to use a smartphone and smartphone apps, how to access videos on cultivation of new crops, crop management and how to find appropriate mandi/market information to sell their produce locally. This will allow women farmers to gain access to information and share experiences and advice with other farmers.

Strategy 3: Building the technical capacity of women farmers to improve their employability and agency in their communities, their confidence and their economic independence.

The key activities will include:

- 6) **Business and financial training:** Krishi Sakhis will be provided training on how to plan their household and agricultural income, expenses and savings so as to uplift their economic independence. They will also be trained on agri-business management and other modules to help them manage their farm productivity and income.
- 7) **Training on operations and maintenance of solar assets:** Some Krishi Sakhis may also be trained on how to operate and maintain solar assets. This will increase their knowledge, and potential to become employed as operators or collections agents with Oorja and earn additional income besides farming.

Strategy 4: Increasing the recruitment of women in last-mile field positions as operators, technicians, and collection and service agents, targeting 20% women in field positions by 2022.

The activities included are :

- 1) **Employment opportunities:** Graduates of the Krishi Sakhi program who have successfully completed training under Strategy 1, 2 and 3 (including modules on operations and maintenance of solar assets) may be offered employment opportunities with Oorja in different part- or full-time positions. This will enable them to earn an additional income and become role models in their communities. Expanding Oorja’s employment of women at the community level will increase women’s income and financial independence and build the foundation for greater outreach opportunities to women farmers as customers and employees in the future.

Some of the benefits that the program will have on women farmers and on Oorja’s business are:



Women’s agency in addressing social and cultural norms: The dedicated training program targeted towards women farmers and rural women will help them in addressing the obstacles they face deriving through social and cultural norms. This is expected to improve women’s confidence, well-being and decision-making capability and to help them experience enhanced self-esteem, agency and voice. The gender-sensitive training will take into account women’s aspirations and needs around Oorja’s service verticals, which may be used to adapt existing services or design new solutions appropriate for them.



Women’s upskilling and access to economic opportunities: The Krishi Sakhi program initiative will benefit women farmers by increasing their knowledge of sustainable and efficient agricultural practices, allowing them to increase their income from farming, creating access to

support mechanisms for access to inputs, knowledge, tools and techniques, and increasing their agency and acknowledgment in their communities.

From a business returns perspective, this will have both direct financial benefits such as positive ROI/revenue generation by supporting women's access to Oorja's clean energy services, access to inputs, and information services can improve market penetration by targeting segments of the potential customer base that were otherwise untapped. In addition, this type of initiative will also lead to direct financial benefits as women farmers and employees become more efficient and effective and have greater spending power.

Outcomes	Sub-outcomes
Knowledge and behavioral change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption of new skills and knowledge enhancement from access to information in agriculture, digital literacy, and agri-business
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase in crop yield by 20-30% ● Increase in income from farming by 30-50% ● Increase in income from secondary sources, such as employment with Oorja or in other organisations ● Savings on energy cost by 20-50% ● Access to high quality agri inputs
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time use efficiency ● Reduction in manual labour and drudgery ● Better consumption, nutrition and food security ● Changes in social, cultural and gender norms ● Improved household dynamics with better decision making capability by women
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sustainable agriculture practices ● Better resource planning and utilisation ● CO₂eq emissions savings ● Resource use efficiency of agricultural

	inputs (seeds, fertilisers, irrigation water, etc.) with training in better agricultural practices
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Impact Assessments

Impact monitoring and evaluation for the Krishi Sakhi Program will consist of conducting baseline and endline impact assessment surveys for both Phase I and Phase II of the program. The minimum number of respondents for the baseline assessment will be 20 women farmers and 20 male farmers to understand the current barriers/challenges they face in practicing farming and the requirement for training to enable a transition to sustainable agricultural practices. All participants will submit baseline information (sign-up form + pre-training survey) which will be collected by Oorja’s ground team (Agronomist, Collections Agent, Project Assistants). The collected data will be digitised on KoboToolbox and analysed by the head office team (Project Officer and Gender Inclusion Intern). After the completion of Phase I of the training, an impact assessment for the program will be conducted with all participants. Further, after the completion of Phase II, a minimum of 20 women farmers will be surveyed to understand the impacts and benefits of the program on their livelihood, farming practices, and digital literacy training.

Target	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity building for 500 male and female farmers on modern and sustainable agronomic practices, including at least 50 women farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 March 2022 - 15 April 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training of 10-50 Krishi Sakhis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 April 2022 - 30 April 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducting baseline surveys (Sign-up forms + Pre-training survey) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 March 2022 - 15 March 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducting endline surveys for both Phase I and Phase II of the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 May 2022 - 15 May 2022

Owner

For Goal II, the development of Phase I and II will be undertaken by the Project Officer and the Gender Inclusion Intern, with oversight by Oorja's CEO. All training at the field level will be carried out by the Agronomist.

Goal 3: To BUILD A GENDER BALANCED ORGANIZATION

Oorja aims to build a driven, passionate and talented team, to promote staff development and growth and to balance employee productivity, satisfaction and well-being. A key area that can be improved upon is gender diversity in the workforce. Oorja understands the need for diversity and is putting in efforts to create a more gender-inclusive workplace for increased organisational performance and reputation. We believe that supporting gender equality can lead to increased positive impacts not only on our organisational culture and operations, improving talent attraction and retention but also will help achieve increased efficiency and productivity.

Oorja is an equal opportunity employer and respects the importance of a diverse and inclusive workforce. The organisation aims to recruit, hire, train, and promote persons in all job titles without regard to religion, race, caste, gender, place of birth, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability status. Oorja endeavors to also provide a safe, diverse and comfortable workplace. Goal 3 will entail designing the methodology, tools, and training on gender equality for internal staff and women especially in field positions. To build a gender-balanced organization, Oorja will focus on four focus areas and in the short term from 2022-2023, Oorja will work on the implementation of these strategies and activities.

Strategic Focus Areas



1 | Leadership Accountability

To promote a gender-inclusive organisational culture and provide a good working environment that is inclusive and fair for all genders, Oorja’s head office members will be leading advocates for gender equality. The organization’s leadership team will oversee, monitor and promote the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027 that supports and values diversity.

For this purpose, we have already implemented two key policies in the organisation at all levels, in order to provide a safe, comfortable and inclusive workplace:

Non-Discrimination Policy: Oorja has adopted a Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities Policy (given in annexure) according to which Oorja will not adversely discriminate, and prohibits other adverse discrimination at the workplace, on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, descent, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability status, age or any other ‘discrimination characteristic’. Oorja will not condone any adverse discrimination against any person on its premises, whether that person is in its employment or otherwise.

Equal Opportunities Policy: In the same policy document, Oorja adopted as company policy the giving of equal opportunities to those persons in its employment, consultancy, or otherwise without regard for discrimination characteristics. All actions of Oorja with regard to its employees, consultants, advisors, interns, and staff, including but not limited to those relating to compensation, benefits, transfers, leave, layoffs, training, education, and assistance, will be made without regard for the discrimination characteristics.

In addition, the organisation is also considering adopting the following strategies.

Strategy 1: To improve the company’s ability to successfully manage a diverse workforce through proactive and regular communication with and sensitisation of employees.

To achieve Strategy 1 the key activities that should be carried out are -

1. **Increase the quality and quantity of conversations occurring between managers and direct reports:** The greater the amount of diversity there is in the workforce, the more managers have to communicate to make sure that everyone’s issues and concerns are on the table. For such purposes, Oorja’s senior, middle and junior management organise weekly one-on-one meetings with their direct reports in order to take updates about their work and understand if they face any challenges and guidance required, along with giving them an opportunity to share their ideas and initiatives. Oorja also has weekly team meetings wherein all the employees are involved and share their weekly work updates. The company also recently launched a bi-weekly Idea Forum in which each team member gets a turn to present their ideas for the betterment and development of the organisation.

2. **Sensitisation workshops:** Oorja will also conduct annual sensitisation workshops for managers to acknowledge and address gender biases in hiring, promotions, etc.

2 | Improving the representation of women in decision-making positions at the leadership, middle management and junior management levels.

To improve the representation of women in decision-making and managerial positions across all levels, Oorja may implement the following strategies and initiatives:

Strategy 2: To increase the recruitment of women for new hires in all positions.

To achieve Strategy 2, the key activities that should be carried out are:

- 1) **Target-setting:** Setting targets for the representation of women in senior, middle and junior management, non-managerial head office and field positions. This would include establishing and monitoring a target of 40% representation of women managers by 2023.
- 2) **Gender lens in hiring strategy:** Integrating gender inclusion into planning and strategy at the organisational level for hiring, promotion, and retention of women and sensitisation of male managers.
- 3) **Gender balance focus at the field level:** Hiring of female employees at field level positions where they are most under-represented, by following the hiring strategies given in Annexure.

Strategy 3: To provide mentorship and promotional opportunities for women employees.

The activities may include:

- 1) **Mapping out women employees' training needs:** Mapping out the current challenges faced by women employees both in the head office and field team in terms of any skill development or training needs and aspirations.
- 2) **Opportunities for women and other employees:** Investigating how to improve promotional opportunities and outcomes for women employees. This could be done by first assessing their potential, and identifying and discussing training needs and development opportunities that might be beneficial for employees to deliver their best results. Oorja already has in place a bi-annual performance review and management process for each employee, wherein employees are given feedback on their work performance, set targets and goals, and guided on their career development, and employees can share their feedback on the working conditions, relationship with their peers and supervisor(s), and training needs. Based on the training

needs identified by employees listed in their biannual performance evaluations, the organisation HR Head will support and provide them with training. We at Oorja believe that proper constructive feedback can strengthen the employee voice and build employee-supervisor trust.

- 3) **Women’s voice and rights:** Oorja endeavors to create a safe place for women, creating a culture where women can voice their concerns candidly. They will be given periodic training on changes in policies, laws, and regulations and on their legal rights as workers (e.g. pay, working conditions, health and safety, and sexual harrassment). All employees will also receive training on the prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace.

3 | Developing and retaining a gender diverse workforce

Strategy 4: Building a gender-balanced and inclusive organisation made up of diverse talents through proactive recruitment, family-friendly leave and workplace policies.

To achieve Strategy 4, the key activities that should be carried out are:

- 1) **Better recruitment policy:** Developing a proactive recruitment policy to ensure gender equality objectives are included and recruitment processes monitored using data on applications received, shortlisting of candidates, and offers accepted by gender and classification levels. Further, the workforce-planning processes should be reviewed to ensure gender equality objectives are included by revising the current Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Policy. This activity should be monitored and progress report data on training and performance should be reported to management on a quarterly basis.
- 2) **Hiring of women at different organisational levels:** Hiring female employees in the field team in different positions such as Project Assistants, Operators and Collections Agents and training members of the field team to understand the current barriers/challenges faced by them and identifying opportunities to recruit more women in last-mile field positions. The organisation should also investigate and identify the issues of retention of women both in the field team and at head office and develop strategies in response to issues identified.
- 3) **Gender equity training:** Conducting a Gender Equity Training session (given in annexure) for its employees at the field level and head office level so they are sensitised about gender inclusion. The objective of the gender lens training with all team members is to sensitise them about internalised gender biases and their impact on the gender dynamics within the workplace. This activity would ensure that all staff are aware of gender equality and related equity policies. Before holding the Gender Equity Training, Oorja will also conduct a needs assessment for gender capacity building, understanding its outcomes, and establishing a baseline. This assessment will examine the organisation’s potential impact on women’s empowerment and the level of integration of gender issues into its overall business model. Oorja will also conduct gender targeting capacity-building sessions for its field employees as described earlier

- 4) **Gender audit:** As a method for gender mainstreaming, a gender audit could help the organisation to identify and understand gender patterns within its composition, structures, processes, organisational culture, management of human resources, and design and delivery of policies and services. It may also help assess the impact of this Gender Mainstreaming Plan on gender equality within the organisation and on organisational performance. Oorja could conduct annual gender audits by first carrying a baseline assessment of the challenges and gaps to achieve gender equity, and measuring progress on these over time. A report will be submitted to management on the identified critical gender gaps and challenges and recommendations will be suggested on how they can be addressed through improvements and innovations.

4 | Reducing pay equity gap and provision of flexible work hours

This strategic focus area Oorja can consider in the long term from 2023 to 2027. The following activities should be undertaken to achieve this:

- 1) **Gender pay gap:** Develop action plans and set targets to address any gaps in pay. This should involve conducting annual gender pay equity audits to identify where pay gaps exist and the reasons for the gaps.
- 2) **Equal remuneration to all working at the same level and performing similar activities for the company's development:** Review remuneration policies and examine commencing salaries and allocation of benefits/allowances above base pay level by gender.
- 3) **Worklife and time balance policy:** Oorja always focuses on the quality of work done instead of the quantity of time spent without quality work. The organisation will consider making changes in the working hours for women and other employees with parental and care responsibilities to better suit their household responsibilities. At Oorja, place paternity and maternity leave policies are already in place. The organisation will also consider implementing or revising HR policies and initiatives that could support staff of any gender to effectively incorporate childbearing, child-raising, and other family responsibilities into their career plans.



Some of the benefits of achieving a gendered balanced organisation are:

This commitment to promoting gender equality can help improve Oorja's overall reputation as an employer and service provider by contributing to positive outcomes in the workforce, in local communities, and in wider society. From a business returns perspective, this type of initiative is tied predominantly to risk mitigation and increased organisational performance and reputation due to better employee engagement, and an improved and more inclusive work environment. In local communities, supporting gender equality will help to scale Oorja's ag-energy services among female farmers and hiring them in different positions.

Indicators

- Proportion of female employees overall in the workforce, and at different levels including head office, field, board and different levels of management.
- Average retention / duration of employment and attrition of employees, both male and female, in the workforce.
- Self-reported satisfaction, comfort and well-being of employees within the workplace and on the job (a regular survey should be conducted to measure this).
- Number of reports of gender-based discrimination or harrasment (or females being treated disrespectfully in general).
- Number of female employees involved in formulation and implementation of strategy and decision-making at the head office and field level.
- Participation by women employees in decision-making and accountability.
- Number of employees provided gender sensitivity and awareness training and capacity building.

Target	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of the current gender equity gap report and the Gender Mainstreaming Report and Action Plan 	March 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adoption and onboarding of field team and head office employees on FreshTeam HR management software 	March 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gender Equity Training Workshop for employees at the field and head office level 	May 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formation of an Internal Committee for prevention of sexual harrasment (POSH) and for taking suggestions by employees regarding the safety, diversity, and culture at Oorja 	May 2022 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducting periodic training on the prevention of Sexual Harasment at the workplace. 	May 2022 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review report on the training and current skill gaps for the employees including women 	June 2022 and ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of an effective complaint lodging and redressal policy 	June 2022

Owner

Oorja's CTO and Finance Executive will oversee the development, key activities, and outcome for Goal 3.

Appendix

- ❖ [Gender Equity Training module](#)
- ❖ [Gender Equity Manual Presentation](#)
- ❖ [Hiring Strategies for Fieldwork positions](#)
- ❖ [Analysis and Rationale Deliverable](#)
- ❖ [Impact Assessment Krishi Sakhi Program Phase-I](#)
- ❖ [Impact Assessment Krishi Sakhi Program Phase-II](#)
- ❖ [Oorja HR Policy](#)
- ❖ [Oorja Environmental and Social Policy](#)
- ❖ [Non-Description and Equal Opportunity Policy](#)