Disha: Creating Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities for Women in India

**Background**

Women face significant social and economic barriers in participating in India's workforce. The country has witnessed a decline in women's participation in the workforce by 10 percentage points between 2005 and 2010. The ILO's Global Employment Trends 2013 Report ranks India 120 out of 131 countries surveyed on female labour force participation. Women also face significant disparities in wages across industrial sectors and women-owned businesses account for only 20 per cent of the total registered businesses in the country.

While creating better and wider employment opportunities for women is an important human development goal in itself, it also has enormous growth potential for the country. Estimates from the IMF suggest that India's GDP could expand 27 percent if the number of female workers increases to the same level as that of men. The importance of women's participation in economic growth is also re-affirmed by an UNESCAP study which estimates that if India's female labour force participation reached parity with that of United States (86%), its gross domestic product (GDP) could gain US$19 billion annually.

A three-year partnership between the India Development Foundation, UNDP and Xyntéo, supported by IKEA Foundation seeks to positively impact the lives of one million women in India through training, entrepreneurial skill development and employment, as well as to develop a new model of public-private collaboration that can be adapted and replicated across India.
Importantly, the partnership aims to bridge the demand and supply gap of women's workforce by addressing barriers at both ends that limit women's participation in the economy. On the supply side, the project works closely with businesses to identify employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, and develop their skills while also looking at public-private cost-sharing models that can ensure long-term sustainability. On the demand side, the project aims to build a model for empowerment, skill development and entrepreneurship opportunities for women.

The project seeks to create a framework that brings together government partners, flagship programmes and schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana or Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, the business community, and a range of implementing agencies to contribute to skilling, employment and entrepreneurship of women. Through an integrated approach that combines skilling, job placement and enterprise start-up support, the project will promote education, skill development and employment through public-private partnerships and in so doing, support the economic empowerment of women and girls.

**About the project**

- Touch the lives of 1 million women over a period of three years and establish a model for broad-based replication.
- Provide women and girls with the skills and knowledge that will help them secure employment or start their own businesses.
- Support the Government of India’s flagship skill development initiatives through policy, research and development support services.

**Looking to the future**

- A tried and tested framework that brings together government partners, flagship programmes and schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana or Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, the business community, and a range of implementing agencies to contribute to achieve desirable outcomes.
- Creation of synergistic links between education and skill and employment and growth in India through public–private partnerships.