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Women's Digital League - Celebrating the Strength, Courage and Talent of Pakistani Women One Digital Task at a Time

Lahore, PakistanPeshawar, Pakistan

Maria Umar

Year Founded:
2010
Organization type:
hybrid
Project Stage:
Growth
Budget:
$10,000 - $50,000

[SHARE]

- Employment
- Income generation
- Information & communication technology
- Social enterprise

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

WDL is a virtual firm providing digital services to clients, proudly owned and powered by Pakistani women. It is working for economic development of the country by mobilizing a vast dormant workforce which is either discouraged from working outside or has trouble finding work opportunities.

WHAT IF - Inspiration: Write one sentence that describes a way that your project dares to ask, "WHAT IF?"

Pakistani women even in the most remote areas of the country could gain economic empowerment without leaving their homes?

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

There is a huge dormant workforce comprising of educated, skilled women who for various reasons cannot work outside their homes. Women make up 50% of Pakistan's population and 59% of them between the age of 18 and 27 are educated. Girls in remote areas are given education by NGOs but they don't have work opportunities and hence not enough incentive to study.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

WDL's focus is on: -women in rural areas without the necessary infrastructure or training to do digital tasks 2- Women in urban areas discouraged from working outside or too busy with family lives to have full time careers The first tier works out of IT Centers in their villages on data entry and data conversion tasks. These women are trained by WDL and partnering organizations. These NGOs or Not-For-Profits have a long history of working with these communities making it easier to persuade male members to allow women to work out of the IT Centers operated by them. Second tier joins WDL's online portal where they can work on advance tasks like wordpress, writing, graphic designing etc for which they are screened and tested by WDL.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

We connect with these women through NFP organizations working on the ground for long years with these communities and have formed a strong trust among them helping in persuading men to allow their women to come work at the IT Centers also built and managed by the partner organizations. After carefully screening, testing and training them we put them on our portal. Their skills are marketed to clients who post tasks to our portal. We have tested the model without the portal in the remote northern areas of Pakistan through a local NFP. We were able to provide work worth Rs. 8000 ($80) a month to 6 women. In a town of roughly 20,000 people they are reduced to tilling their lands. Simple work at $3/hr can be life-changing for them.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date? Also describe the projected future impact for the coming years.

We have worked with several Pakistani women over the last few years belonging to both rural and urban areas. They have worked on tasks for US-based clients doing things like data entry, data conversion, content writing, graphic designing, social media management and SEO. We ran a pilot project in Karimabad, Hunza. With limited work we were able to employ 6 women full time for a month. That's when the impact of this idea really hit us. Now we are doing capacity building with our partner and have trained about 200 people in last 2 months. The training will run for another year. 50% of the trainees are women who will then be connected to work through us. The same pilot program will be expanded to other areas of Pakistan. By providing not only training but also work opportunities from their homes or villages we give an incentive to people to send girls to school.

Sustainability

Financial Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

NGOs and NFPs working on capacity building and skill development will be made partners. First year they will pay 20% commission on total revenue from work sent to their workers. 2nd year onward, a fee will be charged if they want to continue receiving work and training from us plus 30% commission. Similarly, advance level urban service providers will be taken on board to take on higher paying tasks for which we charge them 30% commission.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

Major competitors are portals like oDesk, Elance and Freelancer since they not only take the clients but also attract a lot of the workforce that would rather work with an established system than trust in a new one. India and Philippines are big competitors. Most freelancers & companies offer niche services e.g. website-related work, administrative tasks, writing or data entry. At WDL the goal is to provide all these services under 1 umbrella. It won't be hit & miss as all workers will be screened and matched by us. Also being a social enterprise gives that extra gratification.

Team

Founding Story

When I had my 2nd child I had to leave my teaching job. It wasn't possible for me to work fulltime with an infant. I had heard of people working online as "content writers" so I searched on Google. That was the beginning of a new life for me. Working online from home with clients from around the world on portal such as oDesk was very exciting. It was then I heard about the Picth Night Competition arranged by Women 2.0. and I entered idea for an all-female remote team of Pakistani service providers which received great feedback. There has been no looking back.

About You

Organization:
Women's Digital League

About You

First Name

Maria

Last Name

Umar

Twitter URL
Facebook URL

www.facebook.com/womensdigitalleague

About Your Organization

Organization Name

Women's Digital League

Organization Country

, N, Peshawar

Country where this project is creating social impact

, Lahore

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen..

Project

Year founded

2010

Impact

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date?

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Barriers: What barriers might hinder the success of your project and how do you plan to overcome them?

Living in Pakistan, the first thing to keep in mind is the law and order situation. Frequent strikes and shut downs cause a lot of problem for businesses. Fortunately, WDL is a team of women working from home. This helps in ensuring the 24/7/365 operations that we aim for. Notice for new tasks are sent at the backend to workers with relevant skills who then bid on it – tasks are then awarded based on response-time, previous feedback, and amount quoted. Two women are chosen for the task – if the first one does not activate the task within 30 minutes of being awarded at the backend by going through the right process and starts working then the second worker take over by default. This ensures if there is a problem such as power-failure there is always someone else there to do the job.
Also, we have a project where we collaborate with IT Centers run by local institutions and bring in local women to do basic data entry tasks. Since these IT Centers are based in areas where law and order situation hardly ever gets out of hand, we are able to deal with this problem. Similarly, the IT Centers have power backups such as generators and UPS devices. Through funding we plan to equip these centers with laptops to cut back on energy consumption.
Some women are not only discouraged form working outside their homes but from working at all. Through personal stories from women who have worked with WDL, we are able to break through that barrier and build a trusting relationship. The founder being personally from a highly conservative family, a mother and a working woman is someone that these women and their families can relate to at many levels.

Full Impact Potential: What are the main spread strategies moving forward? (Please consider geographic spread, policy reform, and independent replication/adoption of the idea or other mechanisms.)

This is a tried and tested model that can be replicated anywhere in the world. We receive expression of interest from men and women from countries like Bangladesh and India but also from the US to work as service providers. We are running a 6 month online internship program for Pakistan only. Once tested the idea is to open it up to people anywhere that might be interested in capacity building, polishing their skills,building portfolio and learning how to work with an International clientele.
Through funding we want to take the mission to government level so it may be replicated at a large scale throughout the country in IDP camps, relatively safe tribal areas, and to other places that we lack resources to reach.
We are working with Technovation Challenge (http://iridescentlearning.org/programs/technovation-challenge/) to generate interest among school girls in coding and business. For this again, after running in beta, we plan to introduce to our government to make it a large scale activity for both boys and girls.

Sustainability

Sustainability Plan: What is this solution's plan to ensure financial sustainability?

We are talking with several NGOs and NFPs that have a well-established presence in areas we are trying to reach. They also have necessary infrastructure in buildings and electric supply, computer labs and Internet. We require about $50,000 in startup cost to acquire office space and set it up,hire fulltime IT,finance,marketing professionals,travel inside the country for training and sales,legal firm.

Founding Story: Share a story about the "Aha!" moment that led the founder to get started and/or to see the potential for this to succeed.

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Partnerships: Tell us about your partnerships.

We have partnered with Karakoram Development Organization (KADO), a NFP working in remote northern areas of Pakistan. We are helping them with capacity building as well as providing work to trained service providers.
We are also partners with Think Global Initiative (TGI), a 501(c)(3) NFP in the US working with women entrepreneurs. We are advisors to TGI as well as mentors to the business women and provide digital assistance to the trainees.
We are also partners with UAE-based Consult and Coach for a Cause, a social enterprise helping social enterprises in the MENA region achieve maximum community impact.

Women Powering Work

Is your project targeted at solving any of the following challenges?

Recruitment practices such as job postings, job fairs, and more

Does your project utilize any of the strategies below?

Customizing technology such as mobile phones, websites, or telecommuting tools to enable greater economic participation

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/MENAwomen/competition/entries/women%E2%80%99s-digital-league