Azadi : Redefining Freedom for Women

Lucknow, India | Chicago, United States
Dhirendra Prata...

Organization type: for profit
Project Stage: Growth
Budget: $50,000 - $100,000
Website: http://www.azadi.co.in

- Economic development
- Sanitation
- Wellness
- Social enterprise

Project Summary

Elevator Pitch

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

Azadi provides access to high impact women’s health and lifestyle products such as sanitary pads and solar lights to women in rural India through a network of Female Entrepreneurs.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Women in rural India don’t have access to essential and high quality healthcare and lifestyle products. It remains a problem because the rural retail infrastructure is mainly male dominated with men acting as the retailers and as the purchasers. Furthermore, the social stigma around topics such as menstruation and the gender inequity in rural India extend the problem. As a result, products such as sanitary pads are unavailable in these areas.

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

Given that the problem is mainly one of an accessible channel, it solved best with rural women serving as the retailer of quality women's health and lifestyle products in their villages. We identify a woman to become an Azadi Female Entrepreneur (AFE) and continuously work towards building her capacities for her to become the trusted access point for health and lifestyle products in her village. Further improving the value proposition, Azadi follows a user-centered design approach when introducing products in its product mix. Products have to be ‘wanted’ by the end-consumer and the products also have to meet the quality, affordability and design requirements of the rural Indian woman.

Impact: How does it Work

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

Azadi business model positively makes a difference in the life of two groups of people – our AFEs, and the women in our target villages. AFEs - By engaging with Azadi, each AFE has the opportunity make $20 to $30 a month to support her family. They also receive training and continuous support building to increase her business acumen. AFEs grow into becoming the source of information and essential products, giving the woman an increased social stature in the village. Consumers – Azadi gives its consumers the ability to fulfill aspirations while making integral parts of their life simpler to manage. We do this by providing access to health and lifestyle products that women have no way of locally purchasing them.

Sustainability

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

Azadi competes with direct selling companies, large and small FMCG companies. Focusing their efforts mainly in urban India, direct selling companies, and large FMCG companies only distribute products through the existing retail channel; mainly male run – they are unable to push women’s health products. Small FMCG companies might have distribution into rural India, but their products are poor quality and rarely meet the design requirements of the rural consumer. Azadi differentiates itself though its women led channel, demand-driven product mix, affordable pricing and brand positioning.

About You
Organization:
Azadi Inc

About You

First Name
Dhirendra Pratap

Last Name
Singh

Twitter URL
https://twitter.com/AzadiCo

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About Your Project

Organizations Name
Azadi Inc

Organization Country
, IL, Chicago, Cook County

Country where this project is creating social impact
, UP, Lucknow

How long has your organization been operating?
1-5 years

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.

Your Solution

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

In my previous venture, Milaan, we ran a girl-child re-enrollment program in rural Uttar Pradesh. Over the next few months, we noticed a regular default in attendance of the girls for a week every month that made it further challenging for our teachers to work with girls who barely can read and write. Through conversations, we realized the girls missed school because they had begun menstruation.

As a male who has spent majority of his time in urban India, I never imagined that menstruation could actually hinder girls from attending school. After conducting more research, I realized that over 300 million women in rural India did not use sanitary pads. The market opportunity, along with the potential for impact, let me to begin Azadi.

Select Sector(s): To which of Unilever’s categories of sustainability does your solution apply?
Sanitation and Hygiene.

Measurable Impact

Audience: Who have you identified as your customers/recipients and why? How will you get your solution to them or engage them in your initiative?

Women living in rural India that are between 14 and 29 years, serve as Azadi target customer. Our past data points that younger woman as our early. Thus far, we find that marketing activities that directly engage the consumer are the most effective. These activities mainly include Focus Group Discussions in which a facilitator opens an open forum to rarely talked about issues such as menstruation, reproductive hygiene, and good lifestyle practices.

Impact: What is the impact of the work to date and expected impact in the future?

Azadi currently works with its own network of 52 AFES in villages of Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, India. Each Azadi village has at least 700 girls and women that the AFE can potentially provide access to awareness and Azadi products. We are working towards expanding the AFE Network to 720 villages by end of 2014 in Bahraich, UP to reach out to 500,000 women and adolescent girls in rural Bahraich, UP.

Azadi also builds partnership with organizations that are directly working with women especially with adolescent girls. Till date, we have successfully executed 2 such partnerships to reach out to more than 5000 women in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. We are exploring potential partners to use their existing network, local knowledge and resource to reach out women and adolescents girls, with at least 8 such new partnerships by end of 2014.

Growth, Finance & Leadership

Scaling the Solution: How do you intend to scale your activities over the next two years (e.g., reach new markets, diversify solutions, etc.)? What will make this possible?
We will prove the b-model over the next 6 months by building a network of 160 Azadi Female Entrepreneurs and breaking even at a unit-level. Post validation, we will scale the network to 720 villages in Bahraich, UP. The key to the model is AFE income – we can increase it by having a product mix of 20 products and providing constant on-ground marketing support. Azadi will also form partnerships with existing women networks/organizations to create accessible points for women to provide Azadi products. The prize money will help us to add rural marketing and product design professionals to the team. The publicity will increase credibility and our ability to partner with existing networks to implement the Azadi FE program in their areas.

Financial Sustainability: What is your business model to ensure financial sustainability?

AFEs earn 18 to 25% in product margins giving her the ability to make $20 to $30/month. If an AFE purchases $30 worth of products per month, we break even at a unit level. Azadi has raised an initial investment to $145K to prove our business model and will be raising a round of $500K by Q1, 2014 to scale up. Azadi also has a network of mentors such as Paul Basil, CEO at Villgro, who have experience building similar businesses in rural India.

Experience: Please provide examples of any previous entrepreneurial initiatives you have pioneered.

In 2007, I co-founded Milaan, an NGO that began a school in rural Uttar Pradesh, India that currently feeds and educates over 450 students annually. The experience building Milaan helped me understand the rural consumer and helped build a perspective of the rural landscape. I also served as an Operations Director for Vidya Foundation, providing education scholarships to students in urban Indian slums. The program scaled to 10000 children in 2 yr