Enhancing Employbility of Women in Information Technology (IT) Sector

Report of
Project Launching Ceremony

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Sanjh Preet Organization

Project: "Enhancing Employbility of Female Graduates in Information Technology (IT) Sector in Lahore"

Dated: 25th June, 2015   **Venue:**   **Best Western Hotel Lahore**

USAID Small Grants and Ambassador's Fund Program

This project has been funded by the American People through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

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Executive Summary

From its nascent beginnings in the late 1980s, Pakistan's Information Technology (IT) Industry today Enjoys a global share of US$ 2.8 billion, with current growth rates indicating that the industry will Exceed the 11 billion USD mark within the next 05 years. The sector comprises of around 1500 Companies, with most of them growing in excess of 30% each year, and provides direct employment to around 300,000 people and indirect employment to another 50-100,000. Needless to say, Pakistan's technology scene is booming, and is poised to achieve all that in a decade which other Sectors and countries can only hope to achieve in 15-20 years.

While the above facts and figures are encouraging, what is somewhat worrying is the fact that like most other sectors in the country, this one has also become primarily male dominated. In a research carried out by Pakistan Software House Association for IT and ITES (PASHA) titled, *'Pakistani Women in Technology',* it came forward that women account for 14% of the IT workforce, of which 37% are at the mid-career level while 13% are in Senior Management positions. Reasons for the existing status quo have to do with:

- Presence of the infamous *Mid-Career Glass Ceiling*, when despite the years of experience gained a greater proportion of women continue to persist in mid-level roles with only a fraction transitioning to senior management positions. This in turn is due to several factors such as, discrimination between promotions for male and female employees, not receiving same chances of advancement as their male colleagues, and not being assigned high visibility projects an equal number of times as compared to their male counterparts.
- The *Leaky Pipeline Effect* that women often face while pursuing careers. Women face a number of challenges throughout key life moments which threaten their professional careers such as marriage, motherhood, etc. The result is that a significant number of women "drop off" the career path at vulnerable stages of life.
- Absence of *Women-Specific HR Benefits* such as paid maternity leave, flexible working hours, emergency leave, part-time, day-care facility, and transportation, raining/development/mentoring. Interestingly, in spite of the above those working in the sector reported a passion for IT and communicated their satisfaction in pursuing the area of their interest. However, involvement of more women in this sector was linked to the extension of following kind of support and services by the IT companies:
- Provision of better HR benefits;
- Creation of equal opportunities for women; and [1] Information given in this section has been taken from the following websites:

SP's proposed venture has been designed to address these gaps by working with the IT companies in selected areas of Lahore. Being the first intervention of its kind it is presently being carried at a small scale, with plans of extending its ambit in the future.

Sanjh Preet Organization formally launched the project titled "Enhancing Employbility of Women in Information Technology (IT) Sector. In this ceremony participants from different sectors i.e. Software Houses, Govt., NGOs, Media and Academia (PUCIT) were invited. In this event all participants were given the detail orientation about the project.

Attendance Sheet:

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Attendance Sheet

Project Launching Ceremony Dated: 25th June, 2015

"Enhancing Employability of Women Graduates in Information Technology (IT) Sector"

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Attendance Sheet

Project Launching Ceremony Dated: 25th June, 2015

"Enhancing Employability of Women Graduates in Information Technology (IT) Sector"

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"Enhancing Employability of Women Graduates in Information Technology (IT) Sector"

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Proceedings

All participants mark the attendance before the start of the launching ceremony. The launching ceremony was started with the recitation of Holy Quraan. After that all participants were warmly welcomed by Mr. Abid Hussain Abid CEO Sanjh Preet Organization. During his talk Mr. Abid Hussain Abid shared the Sanjh Preet Organization's history, vision, mission, core thematic areas and its achievements.

History

- Sanjh Preet Organization (SPO) is a national nonprofit, non-religious, non-political non-governmental organization established in 1996.
- It was formally registered in 2002 under Societies Act 1860.
- The organization particularly works with deprived segments of society by adopting multi-sectoral development approach to bring about positive changes in their lives.

Vision

- An educated and developed society where people live a quality life being self-reliant, tolerant, and respectful and exercise equal rights

Mission

- Sanjh Preet Organization will develop human potential to bring about lasting changes. We will do this by empowering the underserved communities by involving them in development process. We will be known as the organization which valued the participation of all sectors of communities specifically children, youth and women

Core Thematic Areas

- Human Rights, Child Protection, Education, Women Empowerment, Youth Empowerment, Health, Emergency Response, Cross Cutting (Social Inclusion, Gender and Peace)

Project Introduction/ Brief

After this session Mr. Pervaiz Ahmad Director Program Sanjh Preet Organization shared the presentation about project with participants. During his presentation he shared about the Donor, project back ground, objectives, target beneficiaries and implementation strategy.

This program was funded by USAID under Ambassador's Fund Program. The USAID's focus areas in which USAID is working are:

Wildlife Conservation, Women's Issues, Culture Preservation, Entrepreneurship, Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

Duration of Project: 10-12 months.

He also shared the back ground of the project that:

- Pakistan's technology scene is booming… *$2 BILLION ESTIMATED SIZE OF THE IT INDUSTRY TODAY in Pakistan;*
- What is somewhat worrying is the fact that it has also become primarily male dominated;
- Women account for 14% of the IT workforce, of which 37% are at the mid-career level while 13% are in Senior Management positions.
- While female occupy more seats in degree awarding institutes;

Reasons of less Employbility of females in IT Sector:
- Perceptions of being male sector
- Less jobs
- Discriminations
- Marriages & Motherhood
- Timings of soft warehouses
- Absence of *Women-Specific HR Benefits* such as paid maternity leave, flexible working hours, emergency leave, part-time, day-care facility, and transportation, raining/development/mentoring

Project Objectives:
- Placing 120 female graduates as internees 10 IT companies; and
- Ensuring regular employment of to high performers at same companies
- Facilitating creation of a gender friendly environment in 10 IT Companies
- Advocacy with Degree awarding Institutes' and software houses in bridging the gaps(Demand and supply)

Project Key Interventions
- Conduct baseline assessment of IT companies
- Mapping of IT Companies – both Software and Enabling Services (Call Centers)
- For the purpose SP will establish contact;
- Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), and Pakistan Software House Association for IT and ITES (PASHA);

- SP will arrange a half-day event for senior representatives of the identified IT Companies, so as to bring them together on one platform;
- Inform them about the objectives and envisaged outcomes of the intervention; and enlist their involvement in the same.
- Identify and finalize 10 IT Companies and sign MoU for internship program;
- Facilitate the selected companies in developing gender policies/gender audit
- Recruiting a certain number of female interns in relevant department

Initiating Internship Program:

- Develop selection criteria of the internees(degree level, secured marks, already on job etc) through joint consultation with IT Companies and Institutes';
- Advertisement on broader level like national newspaper, web portals;
- From among the applications received 120 of the top female candidates will be selected for a 03-month long internship program.
- will also be maintained in an excel-data base of the selected internees
- During the course of internship each company will, in accordance with its HR policies, pay ascertain amount as stipend. Whereas traveling allowance @ Rs. 300/day/internee will be paid by SP through SGAFP's funding;
- Upon completion of the program, each internee will be given a certificate of completion;
- IT Companies will be advocated to retain the interns…
- SP will male develop/share resumes of those not hired with other IT companies in Lahore, and will also place them on job portals like Bright Spyre, Rozee, and Mustakbil

Advocacy:
- Consultation meetings/seminars with Degree awarding institutes and software houses on the issue;
- Conduct a study on the trends of the last five years ratio of female enrolment and joining of professions…from target institutes(proposed one)
- Meetings with Career Counseling Cell of the institutes and share the statistics of the issue
- The findings/lesson learnt of the project will also be shared with the stakeholders;

At the end of the presentation the question answer session was started. Participants shared that this is a unique project and all interventions will make change in enhancing the employability of women graduates in IT industry/ sector.

Question Answer Session

Some participants asked that the internship in software houses is difficult as the software houses have not sufficient space to accommodate the internees. Representatives from software houses gave some suggestions which are:

- Project should be implemented in phases then it will be easy for software houses to accommodate the internees
- Software houses were not given any support by project regarding the internship program, only they will be facilitated in developing and implementation the gender policy.
- The internees should be selected with the consultation of software houses

At the last Mr. Khizer Abbas Gilani shared his views. He shared about the ambassador fund program. He also shared that his support is available for the implementation of the project and if any IT company will submit any new idea regarding the enhancing the employability of females in IT sector the ambassador fund program will consider the idea and support will be provided. He discussed about the deadlines of the project and said that it's compulsory to meet the deadlines and implement the project in its true spirit.

Snap Shots

Media Coverage:

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE
WITH THE International New York Times

Pilot project

'Women underrepresented in the IT sector'

120 women will be placed across 10 universities under placement initiative

AMEL GHANI
LAHORE

The Information Technology (IT) sector plays a pivotal role in the global economy, Sanjh Preet (SP) CEO Abid Hussain Gill said on Thursday.

He was speaking at the launch of a pilot project aimed at making the environment in the sector women-friendly. "Some of the most affluent people across the world come from the sector," Gill said. He said despite its global pre-eminence, women were underrepresented in the sector in the nation. He said SP had discussed the issue with women, universities and owners of IT companies before launching the project.

Gill said the pilot would place 120 women in 10 companies for three-month long internships. He said SP would also work closely with the companies to help devise policies that would enable a greater number of women to join them.

Programme director Pervaiz Akhtar shed light on some of the challenges that prevent women IT students from pursuing a career in the sector. He said the sector was perceived to be dominated by men where there was little space for women to function. Akhtar said this compelled many women to become educators instead of professionals. He said marriage and motherhood also made women leave their jobs as relevant benefits were not provided in the sector.

Akhtar said those employed in the sector did not tend to have set working hours. He said this was the chief reason that prevented woman from working in the sector. Akhtar said of the few women who opted to study IT even fewer pursued it professionally. Stressing the salient features of the pilot project, he said the 120 women would be selected through a competitive process. He said they would be provided Rs300 daily to cover their transportation costs. Akhtar said SP would also try to secure additional stipends for them from the companies they were placed at.

Reservations were raised on the occasion by representatives of several IT companies. Brainoids CEO Sohail Zafar Cheema said the sector did not invest in interns. Cheema, a former provincial minister, said software houses' resources like the provision of a computer and the guidance of a senior professional. He said the benefits of such an initiative to the sector were unclear.

Hussain Ahmed of Net Revelation said he had observed that women were not capable of performing logical and technical work. He claimed women also focussed their energies on getting married. IT academic Sadia Shehzad challenged his assertion saying that most of the women in her classes outperformed men. She said the lack of a conducive environment was the chief hindrance for them. Shehzad said it was becoming increasingly common for IT profession to work from home instead of doing late-night shifts at offices. She said initiatives should be taken to make the sector more women-friendly.

The Dream View CEO stressed the importance of encouraging women in the sector to branch out and establish their own businesses. He said most women tended to be indisposed towards this in contrast to men. The Dream View CEO said this enabled men to take advantage of the vast amounts of outsourced work made available by international companies.

The SP has collaborated with the USAID Ambassador's Fund over the initiative.
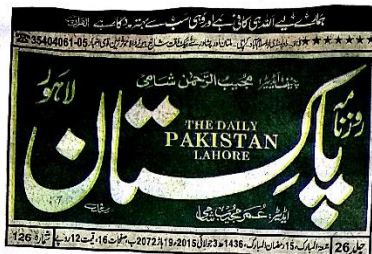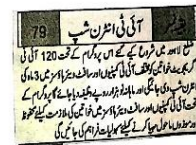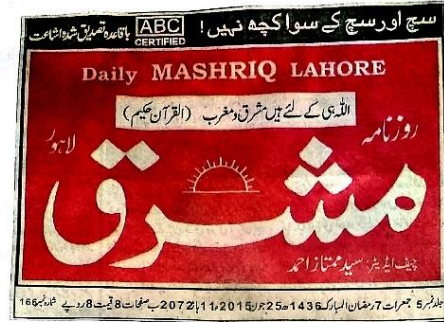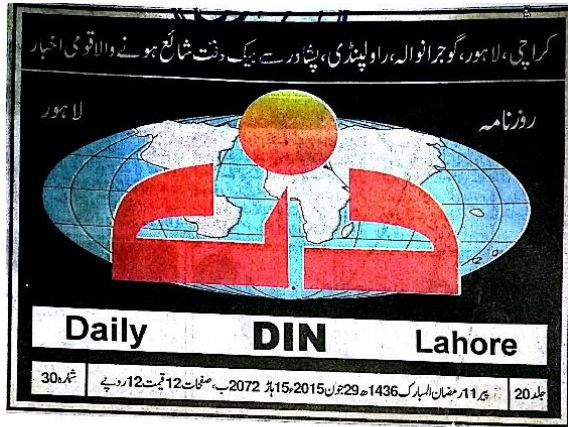
The Nation

Internship for IT graduates

LAHORE: A project has been launched in the city to enhance employability of females in Information Technology (IT) sector by facilitating creation of a gender-friendly environment in 10 IT companies.

The project has been designed to place 120 female IT graduates as internees in the same companies. The project is a joint venture of Sanjh Preet and USAID Ambassador Fund Program.–*PR*

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