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Learnings

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

December 2015

Sanjh Preet Organization

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Background

Sanjh Preet, with financial support from the small grants and ambassadors fund program initiated a project to enhance the employability of female IT graduates in IT industry. The project was conceived and approved on a couple of facts that girls in IT institutions comprise only 22% of the total enrolment and that those who successfully secure a job in any IT firm are only 14%. The issues is further aggravated on the retention of females which presents an equally poor picture on this front.

Poor enrollment of girls in IT institutions refer to less exposure of girls and their parents about the IT sector and its growing needs. Girls in particular are not taking this profession seriously for various reasons like it requires a highly specialized technical skills in software and programming and extra hours of working in the offices. Similarly, the IT sector has already developed some stereotypes that females are not suitable for core technical side of the IT sector, and cannot fulfil the demands of the sector. Further, female IT graduates have some fears about the work environment in IT organizations, therefore they don't prefer this sector for professional career. It has also been observed that coordination among the IT institutions and IT organizations is not very satisfactory and give a reason for underemployment of females in IT sector

Keeping in view a fact that Pakistan's IT industry requires around ten thousand II fresh employees every year, the girls must come ahead and prove themselves as suitable candidates for all types of jobs in this sector.

In order to create a bridge between the IT institutions, and IT employers, and encourage females to join the IT profession, Sanjh Preet and small grants and ambassadors' fund program implemented a project to "enhance the women employability in IT sector". The project specifically addressed following key areas:

1. Internship of 120 fresh female IT graduates
2. Employing the best performers after the internship programme
3. Improving the work place environment in IT companies

The project was designed for Lahore city where software houses/ IT firms and the IT institutions are in abundance. Therefore the project was concentrated in areas with software houses located and offered an easy access to both institutions and employers.

¹ Umar Farooq 2013; www.web.pk

Overview of the project

The project aimed at “enhancing employability of women in Information Technology (IT) Sector” by creating gender friendly environment in the selected 10 IT firms, providing internship opportunities to 120 female IT graduates in selected firms and employing the best performers eventually.

Planned objectives and results

No	Planned Objectives	Progress status
1	Facilitating creation of a gender friendly environment in 10 IT Companies	Gender audit/ assessment reports have identified specific areas to improve and the IT firms have chalked out their gender friendly targets and related actions.
2	Placing 120 female graduates as internees in these 10 IT companies	120 female IT graduates were placed in 27 IT companies in Lahore and 100% successfully completed 3-months internship programme
3	Ensuring regular employment of the top performers at the same companies	49% of the placed interns have been employed

Progress status is also provided below against the planned activities:

Activities	Targets	Achievements	Variance	Remarks
Grant Orientation Event at SPO Office by SGAFP team				
Grant Orientation Event at SPO office in Lahore	1	1	0	
Orientation of staff on Project Activities, outputs to be achieved, project area, code of conduct and risk management				
One day project orientation workshop for entire project staff at SPO's Lahore Office	1	1	0	
HR Continuous Functioning				
5.1 Project Coordinator(1)	1	1	0	
5.2. Administration and Finance Officer (1)	1	1	0	
Project Opening Ceremony				
Conduct of Ceremony	1	1	0	
Press Briefing	1	1	0	
Getting IT companies on Board				
Organize a half-day event for IT companies to bring them on one platform and involve them in the project activities	1	1	0	
Signing MOU with 10 selected IT companies. MOU will require IT company to conduct their Gender Audit; share the findings with their board & Management and make recruitment of female staff accordingly	10	27	17	Target enhanced as per need of the internship program,
Base-line Survey				

A purpose specific Baseline Survey to collect information on project indicators	1	1	0	
Conducting Gender Audit				
Hiring a Gender Audit Expert (GAE) to conduct gender audits of 10 selected IT companies	1	1	0	
Gender Awareness Workshop for staff of 10 IT companies conducted by GAE	1	1	0	
Document and Present Findings & Recommendations in Final Report	1	1	0	
Initiating Internship Program				
Advertisement in national Newspaper with maximum circulation	1	1	0	
Selection of 120 candidates for 03-month long internship program	120	120	0	
Allocation of 120 selected interns to selected IT companies	120	120	0	
Payment of TA @ Rs. 300/day/internee	120	120	0	
Distribution of Course completion certificates	120	120	0	
Sharing resumes of un-employed successful internees with other IT companies and posting on web portals like Bright Spyre, Rozee and Mustakbil etc. (2 sessions on "Career Counselling & Guidance of IT Internees" have been conducted)	2	2	0	2 sessions conducted
Develop video documentary				
Develop video documentary	1	1	0	
Project Closing Ceremony				
Conduct of Ceremony	1	1	0	
Press Briefing	1	1	0	
End-line Survey				
End-line survey conducted and report submitted to SGAFP	1	1	0	
Compliance of branding marking strategy and publicity plan				
Designing Glass plaque, permanent signboard, banners	1	1	0	
Approval of Glass plaque and banners from SGAFP office	1	1	0	
Preparing and installing banners at project launching & closing ceremonies and awareness sessions	1	1	0	
Preparing permanent signboard and installing on main road	1	1	0	
Monitoring & Reporting				
Regular meetings of project staff at-least once a month	8	8	0	
Monthly meetings of project management	8	8	0	

preparation of separate financial record for all the funds received from SGAFP and also for grantee's contribution	1	1	0	
Monthly progress reports (MPR), Monthly compliance status of Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP) & Monthly Expenditure Reports (MER of USAID cost share as well as community/grantee cost share) prepared on SGAFP given format and submitted	8	8	0	
Detailed program and financial review by SGAFP office before releasing 2 nd last installment	1	1	0	
preparation and submission of salary certificate of entire project staff to SGAFP office	8	8	0	
Preparation and submission of EDF to SGAFP office	8	8	0	

Progress status

Mandatory preparatory activities

The preparatory activities included:

1. Orientation of AFP Project to BOD of SPO
2. Recruitment/deputation of Project Staff
3. Grant Orientation Event at SPO Office by SGAFP team
4. Orientation of staff on Project Activities, outputs to be achieved, project area, code of conduct and risk management
5. Finalizing field mobility arrangements
6. Project Opening Ceremony
7. Getting IT companies on board

Right after recruitment of the project coordinator and the administrative & finance officer, the project coordinator and the director programmes organized an orientation of the governing board members on ambassadors & small grants programme and the project objectives and corresponding activities. It was followed by a grant orientation event, which was led by the ambassadors & small grants team. The event was combined with an orientation of project staff on project activities, outputs to be achieved, project area, code of conduct and risk management. The event made the project staff well conversant with the philosophy of the project and related targets, activities and a strategic approach that guided the project staff in implementing the project effectively and efficiently. All the required administrative, logistical and financial arrangements were made alongside the said activities.



Project Launching Ceremony

Project opening ceremony was held after finalizing the above mentioned activities. This activity was not only considered as one of the mandatory preparatory activities, but also a formal beginning towards achieving the planned objectives. IT companies, especially those contacted and selected as project partner and those who actively participated in pre-design consultations were invited for the opening event. The ceremony provided an opportunity to interact with the IT employers and make them understand the project objectives and activities with particular emphasis on creating a gender friendly work place in IT sector that encourages females to opt the IT sector for employment.



Consultation workshop held in UMT Lahore on opportunities and challenges for women in IT sector

Opening ceremony and repeated individual meetings with the IT companies helped in finalizing the 10 IT firms as project partners. The selection of IT companies was done very carefully using a criteria that included following key points:

1. IT companies had their offices near known IT institutions
2. IT companies were managing adequate IT business and were able to accommodate additional interns
3. IT companies were willing to place at least two interns at the same time
4. Ratio of female employees was less than their male fellows
5. IT companies were willing to participate in gender analysis of their companies

Sanjh Preet contacted and enlisted around 20 IT firms initially and filtered 10 after applying the above mentioned criteria and conducting repeated on-to-one meetings with the owners and senior management of the IT firms. To ensure that those selected are fully on board, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlining the roles & responsibilities of both the project and the IT firms was signed. Among other things the MoU required the selected IT companies to:

1. Participate and facilitate in conducting gender audit of their firm
2. Incorporate findings of the gender audit in their policies and plans for promoting female employability in IT sector
3. Place a certain number of female IT graduates as interns and provide conducive and work friendly environment in completing three months internship in their company
4. Provide regular employment to successful and best performing interns

Baseline survey

Baseline study was aimed at ascertaining the existing situation of IT companies and IT institutions with respect to girls' employability, retention and work place environment.

Sanjh Preet used the below mentioned methodology to conduct the baseline study:

1. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with IT sector employers (Manger, Owners, Supervisors)
2. Interviews of employees and managers in IT companies and academia staff (IT faculty) as well as the students enrolled in different IT institutions

Baseline survey was conducted with the following sample:

Total IT institutions and IT companies included in sample = 6 (3 IT companies and 3 Institutions)

Interviews and focus groups with the faculty and IT students = 6 (3 faculty and 3 students)

Focus groups = 6 (IT students of 3 institutions and 3 IT companies)

Findings of the baseline study

Baseline study revealed that female students constitute 24% of the enrolment in sampled IT institutions (all IT disciplines in UMT, PU and FAST). Female enrolment in IT disciplines were reported to be as low as 6% in FAST while the highest enrolment percentage recorded was in Punjab University where it was 40%. Furthermore, the retention of students enrolled in IT disciplines was reported as an issue as around 15% girls either change their disciplines or drop out for various reasons.

It was also noted that girls don't take up highly advanced and technical disciplines within the larger IT profession. Majority of the girls either go for general IT courses to become IT teachers or serve in human resource and administrative sections of the IT firms.

Performance of female students enrolled in IT courses was reported to be low as compared to their male class fellows. This situation leads to a conclusion that a perception lies about girls that they perform comparatively less than that of the boys; confirming a prevailing perception fact boys are more suitable to IT professions than girls and discourages majority of the girls to opt IT courses as their profession.

It was also revealed that parents have a dominating say in girls' decisions about choosing their disciplines; and that majority of parents want their daughters to prefer teaching and medicine programmes/ professions; therefore girls go for general education; teacher's education, and medicine studies normally. Parents wish so because they know less about what good is there for their daughter in the IT sector (where they can teach, work at home and enjoy handsome salaries while working at IT offices as well).

Baseline study also covered the status of women employees in IT companies. According to data received from different IT companies, female employees constituted a range of 16% to 20% of the total staffing, most of them serving in general sections like HR, administration and quality assurance. It was also critical to note that female percentage in specialized IT sections was very low.

In addition to female employment ratio in IT sector, the study observed the female retention in IT sector in two perspectives; 1) advanced IT functions, 2) support IT functions (HR, admin and assurance etc). The retention in technical is poor however retention in other departments is relatively better.

Reasons discussed illustrate for the same scenario include:

1. Girls in technical cannot carry on with the challenging requirements/ demands of the work/ organizations; stretched working hours, uncertain timing of the clients to respond to (global clients especially), urgent tasks to perform (tasks to be done at short notice in off days, marriage etc
2. Girls in other departments perform much better; therefore they stay longer than it was observed in technical departments. Reasons for leaving such jobs include; switching to other jobs/ departments, other organizations, marriage

The above factors were also confirmed by the employees of IT companies interviewed individually and consulted during the FGDs. They shared that women generally perform better in support IT functions and that the IT sectors' requirement is not generally met by the females for safety and security concerns and their limitation to leave for homes in earlier hours (not working in late office hours).

It was also observed that work place environment in IT companies was not very favorable for female employees. The organizational policies were not gender sensitive and required a thorough revision both in theory and in practice.

Further, the coordination between the IT companies and the IT institutions was found to be very poor, and that both IT companies and the IT institutions should take initiatives to come closer and contribute in improving each other's' performance and creating a gender friendly work place all across the sector.

Facilitating creation of a gender friendly environment in 10 IT Companies;

In order to create gender friendly environment, the project adopted a scientific approach that began with a gender audit of the IT companies and all the audited IT companies were supported in developing and implementing the action plans that aimed at improving their work places with respect to gender.

A gender audit expert was recruited for the assignment, who visited selected IT firms to undertake a *Gender Analysis Research Study*. Desk review of relevant documents, focus group discussions (FGDs) with staff, and key informant interviews with management of the IT firms were conducted to collect data and analyze the same to find out ways for improvement. Major findings portray that nearly half of the companies surveyed were aware of the "Protection from Harassment at Work Place Act 2010" while others showed interest and formed a committee on the issue. A few had HR and other related policies but all were of the view to revise these policies with a gender lens. Flexible timings, day care arrangements, and

transport for females in particular, separate toilets, maternity and paternity leaves were among the key indicators included in the study. Organization surveyed revealed different situations against each indicator as only one IT firm included transport allowance for employees, about nine had flexible timings, seven provide medical allowance, eight had maternity and paternity leaves in their leave policy while none of the firms had day care center and five out of 10 had separate toilets for females. In brief, all the organizations needed to bring gender specific reforms in their policies and practices.



Gender Action Plans of IT Companies presentation

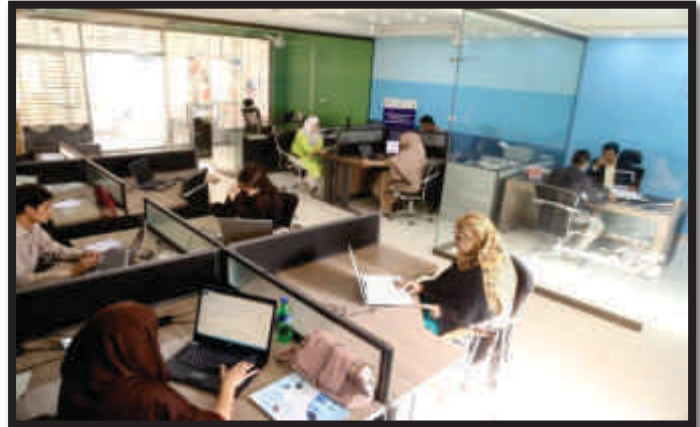


Gender Integration at Organizational level Workshop with IT Companies

Overall percentage of female employees was recorded to be poor; female constituted only 14% of the total staff while their representation in middle and senior management was extremely low. Job descriptions and performance appraisals needed improvement as well. Capacity building opportunities were equally available for both men and women and that induction training/ orientation didn't include any specific content on gender friendly culture. Wage rate for men and women employees received mixed views, but this was more private and substantial data were not available.

The working environment was generally respectful towards female employees, but a couple of gender stereotyping were confirmed by the male staff that women are considered less logical with no career goals, they cannot do serious and technical work and that female employees are not suitable for networking and marketing functions.

The assessment revealed that location of the company's office, office building without elevators, dealing with local customers, late sitting routine, impolite attitude of supervisors, lack of transport, feeling of being a minority in the office and working on hardware and networking were among the major discouraging factors for women to work in the IT companies.



View of internship program in Pinnacle software house

Finally, a day long *Participatory Gender Awareness Workshop* for IT firms' staff was conducted to share the findings of the gender audit and sensitize them on gender equality and gender equity, why are they important, basic gender analysis concepts, how gender affects and is affected in the work environment, and how to integrate gender into daily work. All the participating IT firms were encouraged to develop action plans to integrate gender both in program implementation and office operations, such as gender equitable workplace standards. *Detailed Gender Analysis Reports is attached in Annex-A*

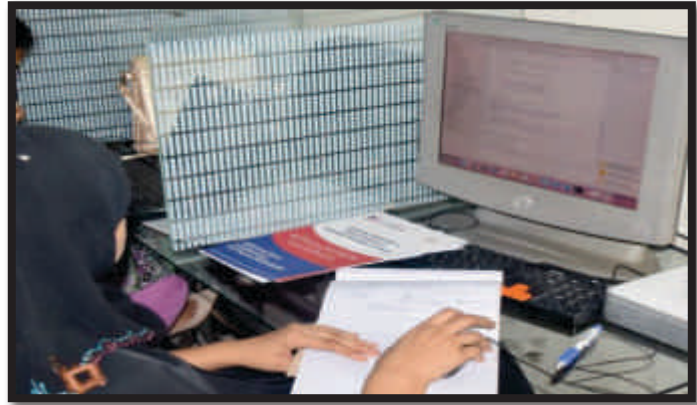


Group Photo of IT Companies with the Gender Analysis Consultant.

Following completion of gender audit and the gender awareness workshop, Sanjh Preet facilitated each IT company in developing their gender action plans in improving their policies and practices in light of the audit findings. Moreover, compliance with the work plan, time lines and budgetary allocations as approved by the company's governing body vis a vis incorporation of gender element in the organizational framework, were also revisited and the IT companies were expected to keep considering these factors beyond the project life.

Placing 120 female graduates as internees in these 10 IT companies;

The project team published an advertisement in known national daily newspapers inviting applications for 3-months internship in IT companies. The eligibility criteria for internship specified that only females having an accomplished degree (passed out a degree in good CGPA) in IT from a recognized IT institution and that the applying females were not employed in any IT firm prior to application. In addition to these advertisements in newspapers, the project staff contacted different IT institutions for applications.



Internship Program in Xnitsolution software house

A comprehensive data base of the applicants was developed and 120 applications were shortlisted out of over 300 applications, and discussed with the selected IT firms for appropriate placement of interns. While placing the interns in some IT firm, course details and the distance from candidate's home to the IT Company were among the key factors that helped in placing the candidates appropriately. Project staff and concerned staff from the IT companies worked jointly and prioritized logistical ease of the interns to travel from their homes to the IT Company's office. Further, knowledge and skills of the prospective interns were also matched with the requirements of the IT Company before deciding their placement. Although doing all this consumed a big amount of time, but it resulted positively and helped all the interns complete their internship programmes.

It is important to mention that initially a large number of interns were dropped out during the first month for high expectation from the internship programme, owing less skills as compare to the demands of the IT companies and transportation reasons, so they were replaced with others picked up from the remaining applications.

Sanjh Preet coordinated with HR department of each company to manage the daily attendance, in and out timings and discussed different aspects of the internship programme with Managers and HR personnel of the IT firms. In order to improve the retention, and have better daily attendance for improved learning and skills development, the interns were given an allowance of Rs.300 per day, which was given to them on the basis of the monthly attendance sheet.

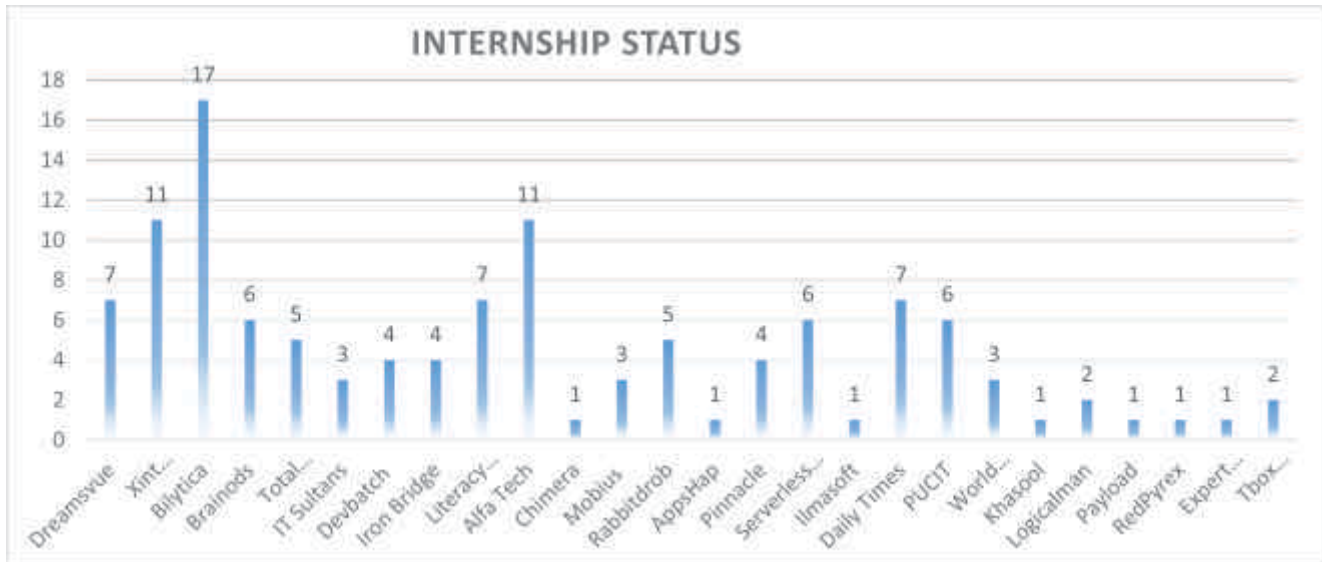
It is also important to discuss that the interns were placed with an existing employee who mentored the interns and helped them grow professionally for future employment. This was decided carefully keeping in view the future employability and comfortability of both mentor and the intern.

The project team faced a real challenge initially when they noticed that all of the 120 interns could not be accommodated in pre-selected 10 IT firms. Therefore the team went out again and identified additional IT firms for internship to make sure that the IT companies accommodate interns according to their absorption capacity and future employment needs. Another 17 IT firms were contacted for internship programme and they agreed to the Sanjh Preet's proposal for placing IT graduate girls as interns.

Exactly 120 interns completed the 3 months long internship and were given a completion certificate bearing stamps and signatures of the designated persons from the IT firms, the USAID and the Sanjh Preet organization. Approximate 50% interns have been employed by their respective companies, while CV/ profiles of the remaining interns have been placed on various job portals like Bright Spyre, Rozee, and Mustakbil. The remaining interns have also been briefed to continue to apply for jobs and stay prepared for interviews.

The figure below depicts the number of IT firms and their intern intake number:

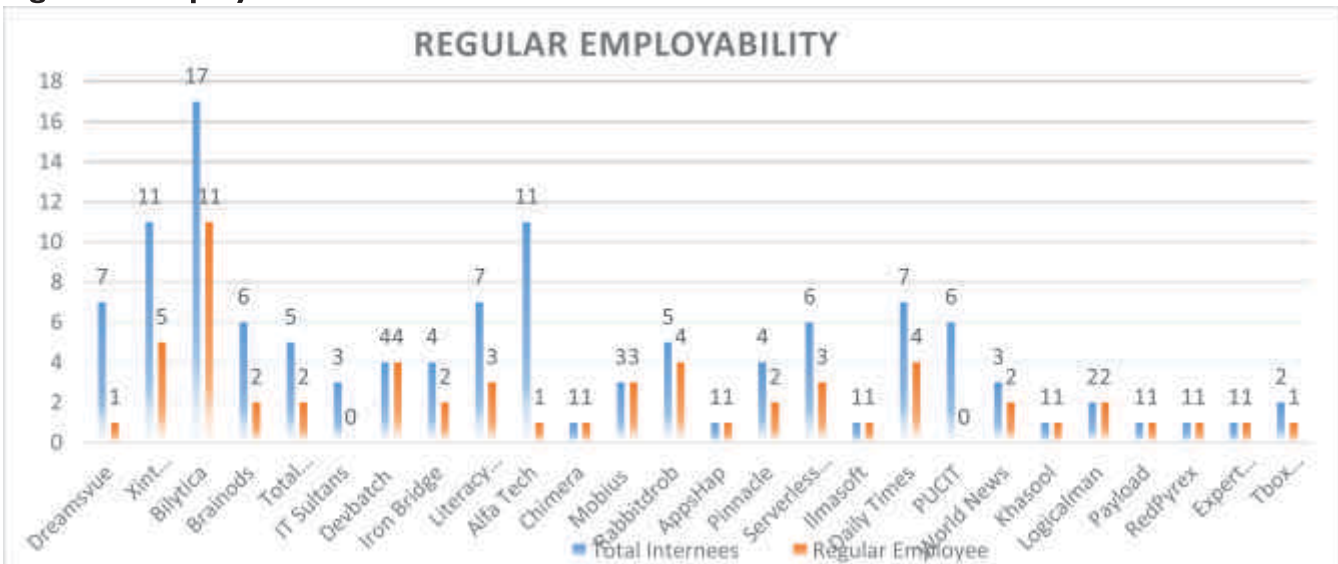
Figure 1: It firms and interns placed therein



Ensuring regular employment of the top performers at the same companies

Before the project was commenced, it was assumed that 10% of the interns may get regular employment considering the female employment trends and their percentage in IT firms. But the results were far better than they were envisaged; 59 out of total 120 interns were able to get long term contracts/employment in the IT firms they were placed as interns. The figure provided shares that most of the IT firms were able to recruit the best performing interns.

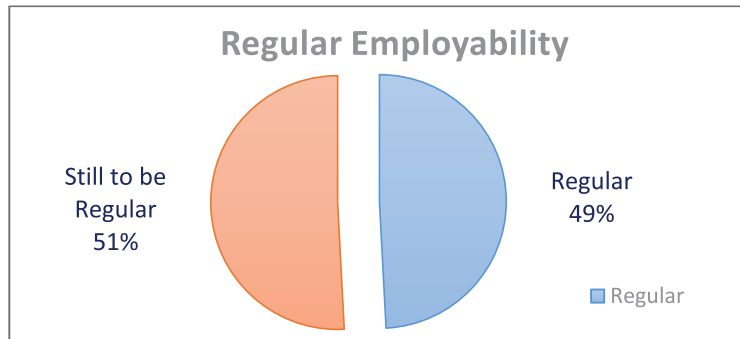
Figure 2: employment trend of interns in IT firms



It is important to mention that Bilytica, being a big IT company not only accommodated maximum number of interns but provided regular employment to 65% of them. Similarly Xint solutions employed 5 out of 11 interns. However, PUCIT and IT sultans could not employ any of the interns owing to various reasons; PUCIT could not do it because of their Government recruitment procedures and IT sultans didn't have enough funds and any vacant position at that time. However, these firms and those who could only employ a very few, promised to give priority to females especially those who had completed internship with them.

Figure 3: percentage of employed interns

The figure depicts that 49% interns placed in 27 IT companies could secure regular employment while 51% could not manage to get through and secure any long-term contract. CVs of the remaining (unemployed) interns have been uploaded at known job portals and are lying with the partner IT firms. They have also been briefly trained about making regular and continuous efforts and keep themselves prepared for interviews as well.



Challenges faced

- It had been difficult to convince IT companies for internship program and bring them on board through the MoUs
- Dual challenges faced from interns as well as from software houses Software houses/ IT Companies expected a high level of professional skills that interns must possess and Knowledge and skills of the interneers were less compatible with the demands of software houses/ IT firms (huge gap between supply & demand of skill set)
- Prevailing stereotyping among software house employees that female employees' lack of knowledge and expertise created additional challenges in placing the female graduates at appropriate places. Male employees always suspected the skills of female interns/ employees;
- Drop out of interneers from Software houses especially during initial month of internship caused serious challenges, which were later mitigated by putting in more efforts. Such drop out occurred because the female interns expected more financial gains even during the internship period and expected to have more liberty and flexibility in timings
- Female interns lacked professional communication and confidence during initial weeks, but gained momentum in the second month.
- Quality of IT education (knower and skill set) of the interns was not of a good quality, which in fact harmed female interns in proving their worth as capable professional and become well eligible for internship. Such a gap was later bridged with practical experience and continuous mentoring by the supervisors
- Professional behavior of a few supervisors was complained by the interns, which created serious concerns. These were mitigated through mutual discussions and involving management in some cases.
- Project staff was extremely inadequate as the entire project was managed by two persons (1 project coordinator and 1 admin & finance person), although Sanjh Preet shared project management and involved additional staff to manage different activities, but the projects of this nature definitely need more staff.

Best practices

- Almost 50% internes succeeded in getting jobs in the same software houses, which was much more than envisaged. This is specifically attributed to extensive social mobilization of the IT companies and their realization to fact that female employees are absolutely required in the IT sector

- Gender audit and analysis of IT companies was an activity conducted for the first time that actually made the target firms realize a fact that gender analysis is an important activity and this will certainly help them in improving their environment and make it gender friendly by revising and tailoring their policies to make them gender responsive
- The gender audit, and analysis as well as the internship programme have identified that gender gap is really an issue and that these companies offered employment to about 50% interns after this realization
- The project engaged all the relevant stakeholders and took them all on board at right time. This is being termed as one of the best practices that Sanjh Preet involved IT Companies, IT institutes, students and the government. All of these played their role and accepted realities.
- The knowledge generated by the project can be used by software houses and institutes in bridging the gaps that exist between the employers and the institutions in improving the IT courses/ curriculum and emphasize the relevant skill set required in the market for enhancing employability eventually.
- Project provided the opportunities to internees as well as software houses to interact and contribute to each other's needs. The interns are now well aware of the right skill set that they should focus on.

Lessons learned

- Baseline conducted by the Sanjh Preet at the onset of this project and the gender audit/ analysis of the IT companies have endorsed the findings of PASHA research study that only 14% women are employed in IT companies. The IT companies have accepted such facts and have offered employment to females on urgent basis
- Such facts have been an eye opener to the IT companies, who have started showing interest immediately to develop gender responsive and gender sensitive policies and action plans
- IT companies have indicated that three-months internship is inadequate to impart a sufficient level of knowledge and skills to the internees; therefore they proposed to have at least 6-months long internship in future programmes
- The agreed stipend amount for the interns was less attractive in convincing them to join a useful internship programme
- There should be a comprehensive advocacy component with IT universities and the Government to address issues lying with the IT courses/ programmes and to set up placement and career counseling cell in addressing the issues faced by the IT students in getting jobs

Recommendations

- There is need to initiate the internship program at institute level and internship should be a compulsory part of the degree program;
- In addition, the IT institutions must initiate an exposure programme for students to remove their hesitation from the market / IT industry
- The demand and supply gaps between degree awarding institutes and IT companies need to be bridged through mutual coordination and the degree programs need to upgrade their courses/ programmes in lines with the market demands
- The Institutes need to improve the quality of the education and that more emphasis should be on practical work that is less as indicated by the internees during discussion
- The career guidance and counseling of the students as well as of parents needed when students come for admissions
- More worked out and capacity building sessions with the IT firms to help them tailor their policies and improve the work place which is gender friendly and gender responsive
- Some monetary support to set up day care center and separate toilets (may be on cost sharing basis) will motivate the companies to invest on creating gender friendly spaces



Annexure-A

Gender audit/ analysis report

Consolidated Report Gender Audit and Assessment of IT Companies, Lahore

**“Enhancing Employability of Women Graduates in
Information Technology (IT) Sector
in 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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SECTION (I)

1. Introduction and Background

Sanjh Preet Organization (SPO) is a non-profit, non-religious and non-partisan organization working for the uplift of the marginalized communities by creating conditions where they have access to equal rights, opportunities to live a quality and respectable life. The organization is implementing various projects in Pakistan on Education, Child Protection, Youth and Women Empowerment, Human Rights and Emergency Response². SPO has realized the fact that IT industry in Pakistan is growing and women's participation in this industry is a crucial need of time. Currently, Sanjh Preet Organization has entered into partnership with USAID-SGAFP to implement a Women Empowerment project titled "Enhancing Employability of Women Graduates in Information Technology (IT) Sector" in the select areas of district Lahore. The project aims to enhance employability of females in Information Technology (IT) Sector by: i) facilitating creation of a gender friendly environment in 10 IT Companies, ii) placing 120 female graduates as interns in the same; and iii) Ensuring regular employment of the top performers at the same companies.

SPO recognized the need of gender audit/assessment of the host IT companies with whom it has engaged through a partnership on the internship program. 120 female IT graduates have been placed in 20 select companies as interns. 10 IT companies were assessed and audited in gender perspective.

Objectives

The objectives of the Gender Audit and Assessment were:

1. To develop gender audit/assessment framework and research tools
2. To collect data through document review, interviews of key persons at 10 IT companies, focus group discussions with female interns and gender assessment questionnaires and personal observations of working environment of IT companies
3. To produce gender audit reports of 10 IT companies
4. To conduct a gender workshop for key staff of IT companies in order to develop gender action plans and review their HR policies

Based on the gender audit/assessment findings, a one day gender workshop for key staff of the IT companies was also conducted which facilitated them in developing action plan for integrating gender into their HR/personnel policies.

2. Approach and Methodology of Gender Audit and Assessment

The specific objective of this assessment was to audit and assess the current status of the companies and to make suggestions for possible gender integration in their policies, procedures, personnel and practices.

² Sanjh Preet Project documents

The consultant engaged with the key staff in 10 IT companies both males and females. The tools used were key person interview individual gender assessment questionnaires and focus group discussions. The gender audit took place in October 2015. Participatory Gender Assessment Questionnaires were applied to 40% staff ranging from junior to senior management positions in select IT companies. Female interns were also engaged in the inquiry by holding 2 focus group discussions with them where 13 female interns from Dreamvue, Alphatech and Xint Solutions participated. The approach of data collection was participatory, appreciative and interactive. Questionnaires on the company's gender assessment were filled out either by HR person or by the head of each Company.

Limitations

A limitation was noted in accessing the written policies, SOPs and HR manuals of the companies and the company's website contained information only related to business scope and promotion. The second limitation was the busy, quiet and controlled working environment of the companies during the visits and interviews, which did not allow interaction with the staff generally. Since the companies were participating voluntarily in the gender audit, the assessment was completed within the given time without causing disturbance in their office routine.

Organization of the report

This report presents the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations of the gender audit/assessment. However, gender audit/assessment reports of each 10 IT companies have been drafted separately.

SECTION (II)

1. Findings of Gender audit/assessment

The gender audit/assessment framework used focused on gender mainstreaming or integration at the company level (organizational level). This particular framework was used keeping the Sanjh Preet project's objectives in mind, which aims to increase women participation in work force in the non-traditional Information Technology sector. It obviously requires gender friendly working environment in the first place. The following areas were assessed with gender lenses.

1.1 Gender integration in IT Companies

a. Policies (HR/personnel policies and gender policies)

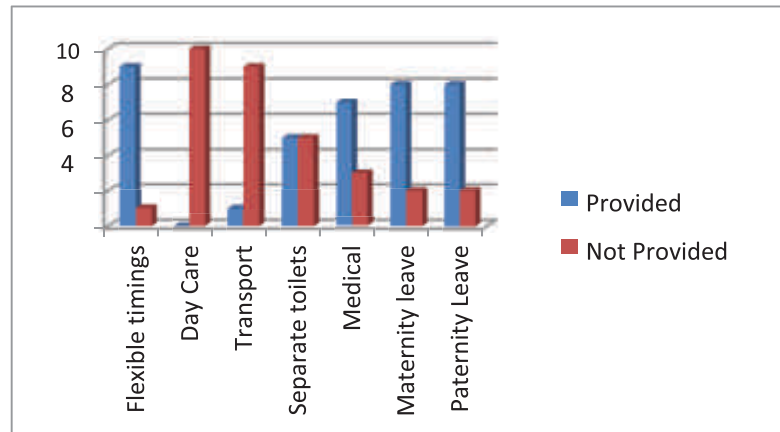
The size of companies interviewed varies in terms of number of staff and office space. The ages of the companies are 2-15 years.

- All the companies mentioned that they have developed their **HR/personnel policies** except one company which is newly established and in the process of development of HR/personnel policies and procedures. The companies have HR policies which are mostly about personnel, SOPs and data security. No other policies are accessed; expect few which have a comprehensive HR policy available on its website.
- 8 out of 10 companies have written vision/mission/goals on their sites but all are about promoting business and expansion.
- 6 out of 10 companies are aware of the **"Protection from Harassment at Work Place Act 2010"**, and 5 companies showed interest to form a **committee** on the issue.

The provided facilities in the IT companies were assessed. Table 1. shows the overall picture of the facilities.

Table 1. Provided facilities

Flexible timings: 9 out of 10 companies provide flexible timings depending on the nature of work e.g., working from home, no work on Saturdays, no late sitting etc. Female interns also work from 9 to 5 as compared to regular male staffs who work from 9 to 6, which shows that there is time flexibility in the industry.



Day care: None of the companies provide day care facility. Most of the companies assessed are located in shopping malls, small plazas and residential areas. 2 companies have their office in Arfa Software Technology Park, where a few female IT professionals work. This modern facility provides eating area, mosque and public washrooms but no day care facility.

Transport: 1 out of 10 companies have included a transport allowance in the staff salary.

Separate Toilets: 5 out of 10 IT companies provide separate toilet facility for female employees, which have either their offices in Arfa Technology Park or in the residential areas. However, companies in other commercial areas do not provide this facility, because the offices are structured with only one toilet.

Medical: 7 Companies provide medical allowances to all the employees and even related to reproductive health like delivery and postnatal care and 3 companies do not provide medical allowance, which is due to either being new in the field. Also, companies with local customers do not follow the labour laws.

Maternity and paternity Leave: 8 companies with the standard HR and personnel policies follow government rules for maternity and paternity leave 45-90 days and 7 days respectively. But the newly established companies and the local companies do not provide these facilities.

Any Other: Only one company provides a common room for women staff and interns, which the interns find very convenient and relaxing. After spending hours in front of the computer screen they use the room during breaks.

b. Procedures (women’s participation in decision making and communication strategy)

Participation in decision making forums: Women’s participation in the decision making forums is low in the companies. Only one company has a woman member in the committee. Her membership is based on seniority in position.

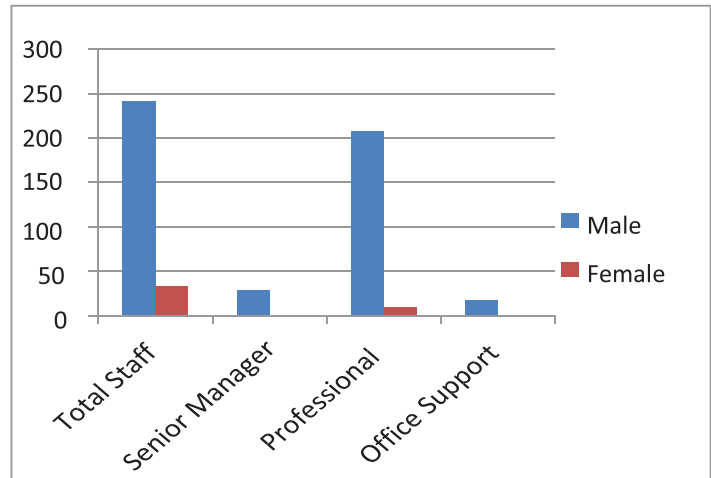
Gender perspective in communication strategy: Only 2 companies keep women’s and men’s perspectives in their communication materials for instance on brochures, website and newsletters. Findings show that women are considered best in designing and understanding colour schemes, so their suggestions or decisions in this regard are highly valued.

c. Personnel (Gender balance of staff and capacity building training)

Gender Balance of Staff: Assessment findings tell that there is no staff gender balance. Table 2. shows the consolidated figures of the staff sex ratio in 10 IT companies.

Table 2. Staff Gender Ratio

All the senior staff members in the companies are male except one company, where the senior HR manager is a woman. The percentage of women's participation in the assessed IT companies is less than 14% and only 1 woman is employed at the support level. It shows that women's participation in IT work force is very low, and women are mostly mid-level professionals. None of the assessed companies are owned by women entrepreneurs.



Gender sensitive Job Descriptions (JDs) and Performance Appraisal (PA):

The assessment's findings tell that there are mixed views on this specific issue. 50% of the respondents in a company said that JDs and PAs are gender sensitive while 50% responded that they are not gender sensitive. Upon examination it was exposed during the interviews that gender sensitivity is not included in the JDs and PAs.

Capacity building opportunities: All the companies provide on the job training and orientation sessions to the newly joined employees equally. Contents of the orientation sessions are mostly on personnel policy, office environment and procedures but do's and don'ts are learned from observing the organizational culture. Only one company has a proper career plan for the employees including benefits, promotion and training.

Encouraging factors: The assessment's findings convey that the following factors are encouraging for women to work in the IT Company: Gender specific SOPs and policies, gender awareness sessions, presence of female HR/admin person, flexible timings, separate sitting space, good communication among staff, working in designing, content writing, HR work, gender specific SOPs, separate toilet and common room.

Discouraging factors: The assessment revealed that the following factors discourage women to work in the IT companies: location of the company's office for example residential area, or in a building without elevators, dealing with local customers, late sitting routine, impolite attitude of supervisors, lack of transport, feeling of being a minority in the office and working on hardware and networking.

Equal wages: The findings confirm that there are mixed views on equal wages. But this issue is highly private in the IT companies. As a rule, sharing the wage rate even with colleagues is not allowed and frowned upon in the private sector.

d. Practices (Organizational Culture and women friendly environment) All the responses of the assessment questionnaires state that the companies have maintained a reverential working environment. The presence of female staff and interns has also made the office environment more formal. A common perception is that since the employees are university graduates, they do not use inappropriate language. So far not a single case of work place harassment has been reported. The assessment uncovered that gender stereotyping for example, 'women are considered less logical with no career goals or they cannot do serious work' exists among the staff. Another finding is that women stay longer in jobs if they learn skills and feel comfortable with the environment. In 3 companies there is a perception that women are culturally not suitable for networking and meeting with customers. Nevertheless, the office environment was seen to be women friendly. Women respondents were of the view that the male colleagues are socially independent and have exposure to the outside world. As a result they are good at personal and professional networking and thus are in a position to benefit from opportunities as compared to females.

1.2 Placement of Female Interns in IT Companies

A major tangible activity of the project was placement of 120 female IT interns in 10 select IT companies. Criteria for the internship was developed and advertised in the local newspapers. Consequently, 369 applications were received and interviews were conducted. However, 115 of them refused to join the internship program because they wanted jobs instead of internship. 120 interns were placed in 10 IT companies for three months with Rs. 300 per day stipend.

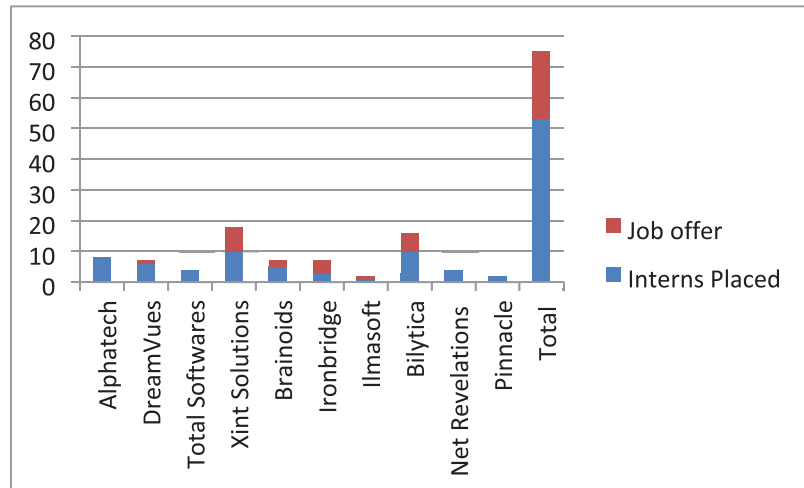
The interns placed in the IT companies have done their BSIT/BSCS/MIT in 2014 and 2015 from different IT universities in Lahore. One has done an MA in gender studies and another has done MBA. One intern had moved from Gujranwala to Lahore for the internship. The interns' ages fall between 21 and 27. Only One of the interns was married.

It was discussed that a number of interns dropped out after the placement. The reasons of drop out given were:

1. High expectations of getting into big IT projects from the beginning
2. Distance from home
3. Stairs in office building with multiple stories
4. Less stipend
5. 9-5 office timings
6. Companies needed high expertise and there was a gap between market demand and skill sets of the female IT graduates
7. Resource matching issue for instance some IT companies needed female interns with a background in marketing, HR and communication instead of IT.

Table 3. Job offers by companies

53 interns were placed in 10 IT companies, which participated in gender audit and assessment. 43% were offered job by the same companies. Table 3. shows the job offered to interns by different companies: Bilytica, Ilmasoft, Ironbridgh, Brainiods, XintSolutions and Dreamvue.



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

2 FGDs were conducted with 13 female interns (groups of 6 and 7) from Dreamvue, Alphatech and XintSolutions. FGD guide (Annex 2. Data collection Tools) was used and the responses were recorded. A summary of findings is presented below:

University background

- None of the universities the female interns have studied at develop linkages with the IT industry for internship programs. Teaching is mostly theoretical except the final year project which is also done as a formality. No job fairs or career counseling are provided at the university level.
- Male students usually use their networking skills to enter the industry while female graduates lack access to informal networking for jobs or internship. The industry demands 1-2 year work experience for recruitment.

Learning outcomes of the Internship Program

- They were learning through team work, guidance by supervisor and Google search.
- The learnt technical skills during the internship were: coding, interface designing, android development, layout designing, IOS development, PHP, web development , iPhone Apps, JVA script, PHP website designing. In addition their internet searching skills have improved tremendously due to the internship.
- Other leant skills were: communication skills and self-confidence
- Learning process at IT companies was: individual work, team work, working in live/current projects as APIs, CMS and word press.
- The most beneficial aspect of the internship was learning practical application of knowledge and being introduced to the working environment. They appreciated that the stipend and linkages have helped them access the industry finally.

Facilities provided

- They have been provided with laptops and working stations in the host companies. A courteous working environment has made work more rewarding and exciting for them.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

- There are companies signatory to the UN Global Compact or comply with the seven guiding principles of women empowerment (WEP) for conducting business in a socially responsible manner. The seven principles emphasize the business case for corporate action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (please visit <http://weprinciples.org/Site/PrincipleOverview/>). Women issues have been neglected for a long time, now companies around the world are investing their CSR funds in gender-related or women specific interventions.³ The recent partnership of IT companies with Sanjh Preet is a good example of diverting the CSR initiatives towards employability of female IT graduates.
- Since the IT companies (software houses) are purely business oriented, their focus is primarily on production and sale. They hardly spare time for organizational development like policy formulation or revision. However, their voluntary attitude of accommodating female interns, fixing their system and following the international standards is obvious from their willingness to learn.
- The internship program offered by Sanjh Preet was highly appreciated by the companies and the interns. It provided the female graduates with an opportunity to access the industry. It has also been a great opportunity for application of theoretical IT knowledge and to learn the employable skills.
- The need for a longer period of internship program was expressed by the interns, which will help them to get into the job market because it takes almost a year to learn the IT skills.
- Since the universities do not have plans to develop linkages between students and the industry, it becomes very hard for the female graduates to find internship and jobs. They mostly end up teaching in schools and academies. There is a need to bridge this gap. Organizations like Sanjh Preet can play the role of a moderator in this regard but how needs to be worked out.
- IT work is mostly result oriented and it offers flexible timings for the skilled professionals who can work independently from home, which makes the field highly convenient for women to balance work and family life.
- It was interesting to observe that 8 out of 10 IT companies are hardly 5 years old and mostly young people with energy and fresh ideas are running the businesses. They are more liberal, flexible, willing to learn new things and ready to take risk. The working environment of these companies is more gender friendly.
- Arfa Software Technology Park could be approached for opening a day care center for the employees working in the building.
- This small initiative has opened up opportunities for the female graduates, IT industry and Sanjh Preet to understand the issue and find solutions. For example initiating dialogues with the universities on issues related to internship program and practical application of the learnt skills.

³ UN Women-Corporate Sector Responsibility and Private Sector Engagement on Women's Economic Empowerment

6. Checklist for Organizational Gender Integration

Table 4. shows the checklist which is a guide to integrate gender into policies, procedures, personnel and practices.

Table 3. Checklist for Gender Integration in Company		
<p>Policy Documents</p>	<p>Does the company have any sexual harassment policy?</p> <p>Did the company carry out any consultation with women and men staff for policy formulation?</p> <p>Does HR/Personnel policy promote appointment, recruitment and hiring of women?</p> <p>Does the HR/personnel policy mention about work place facilities, e.g., separate toilets, day care, transport etc.?</p> <p>Does the HR/Personnel policy mention about leave, flexible hours, equal training opportunity for women and men staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sexual harassment policy with implementation mechanism is in place. ✓ # of women and men staff (in different grades) consulted for policy formulation ✓ %age of women at different grades ✓ %age of women appointed ✓ encourage women to join, to apply for promotions and positions ✓ Separate toilets for women and men ✓ Day care facility for male and female staff ✓ Transport for daily commute ✓ Flexible hours for women with small children and care work responsibilities ✓ Maternity leave-days, paid/unpaid, and procedure to avail ✓ Paternity leave- days, paid/unpaid, and procedure to avail ✓ %age of women participate in training ✓ %age of men participate training and type of steps taken to
<p>Procedures (Implementation mechanism)</p>	<p>Are women and men informed about policy decisions?</p> <p>Does committees/task force comprise both women and men staff members?</p> <p>Are women involved in decision making?</p> <p>Is the HR policy manual accessible for both women and men staff members?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ #of women and men informed about policy decisions of all levels and mechanism of information sharing is set. ✓ #of women committees members ✓ #of men committees members ✓ # of women committee chairperson ✓ # of women participate in decision making meetings ✓ #of men participate in decision making meetings ✓ # of HR policy brief or copies circulated among men staff
<p>Practices</p>	<p>Is appropriate language used at the work place?</p> <p>Does the company culture value job and family responsibilities of the women and men staff?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Written protocol on use of language at workplace is developed and displayed in offices ✓ Written office hours/duty schedule displayed in offices ✓ Harassment redressal committee with women and men membership ✓ ToRs of the Sexual harassment redressal committee ✓ Confidentiality of the complainant is ensured.

	<p>Is there any decent reporting and redressal mechanism in place in case of sexual harassment?</p> <p>Is awarding staff based on efficiency and effectiveness or personal like/dislike and favoritism?</p> <p>Do women have separate toilet facilities in the office?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Penalties are set for incidents of inappropriate language and harassment at work ✓ Staff are awarded on efficiency and effectiveness only ✓ Separate toilet is arranged for women staff.
Personnel	<p>What is the gender balance in management and staff?</p> <p>Are gender sensitivity indicators a part of the staff Job description and performance appraisal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women and men staff are in the company in general and in management/decision making position. ✓ Maintaining respectful working environment is part of the staff performance appraisal
*adapted from CGaPS Checklist-WEE Guidelines		

Annexure-B

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

AMEEL GHANI
LAHORE

The Information Technology (IT) sector plays a pivotal role in the global economy, Sanjiv 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 women 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 se-

lected 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 in 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 focused 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 Sanjiv Preet and USAID Ambassador Fund Program.-PR

Daily Times
Thursday, October 8, 2015

Opportunities and challenges for Pakistani women in IT sector

Sanjiv Preet Organization has organized a consultative workshop at UMT. This workshop was basically organized for the female IT graduates with the provision of internship to enhance the employability of women in IT sector. Currently the situation of employability of women in IT sector is only 14%. Sanjiv Preet Organization is working with the collaboration of USAID under Small Grant Ambassador Program (SGAAP) to enhance the employability for women in IT sector. This consultative workshop was attended by Abid Hussain Gill (CEO Sanjiv Preet Organization), M. Rashid Aziz Preet, coordinator, Pervaiz Akhtar Director Program Sanjiv Preet, Chairperson Punjab Commission Mr. Faiz Vajid, Sohail Zafar Cheema (CEO Brainoids software house), Mr. Khair Abbas Gillani from SCAAP (USAID) and a large number of attendees. es



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Head Office Lahore
57-J2, Johar Town,
Lahore
Ph: +92 42 35301657

Regional Office Multan
41-R, Khayaban-e-Kubra
Sher Shah Road, Multan
Ph: + 92 61 6514505

District Office Nankana Sahib
201-Y, Housing Colony
MultanNankana Sahib
Ph: + 92 56 2874888

Provincial Office Peshawar
Afzalabad Old Bara Road,
Beside Deans Apartments
University Town, Peshawar
Ph: 091-2601210

www.sanjhpreet.org Email: info@sanjhpreet.org