

IMERIT TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

METIABRUZ CENTER

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Introduction to Anudip and iMerit

In recent decades India has become an integral part of the global economy and the large populace has the potential to greatly influence the fields of technology, health and education in the coming years. However, as India's economy has grown, many citizens have been left behind and lack the skills needed to enter the modern workforce. In 2005, Anudip was created with the goal of providing IT, life skills, and livelihood training for the rural poor in India, focusing primarily on women and youth. Anudip's curriculum, known as Market Aligned Skills Training, or M.A.S.T., focuses on such skills and helps trainees become employable members of society. Since Anudip's inception in 2005 the organization has trained over 15,000 people who have been placed with over 400 different employers, with approximately 80% of Anudip graduates being placed in permanent positions upon completion of training.

Following the success of M.A.S.T. and recognizing the potential for job creation in the technology sector, the founders of Anudip expanded the nonprofit by creating iMerit, an IT services company that provides web-based, scalable, and customized technology solutions to clients both domestically as well as internationally. iMerit currently has four IT delivery centers located across the Indian states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha - locations which were chosen based on the location of Anudip training centers as well as on the economic need present in these communities. Each iMerit center is capable of performing a number of different IT services to clients, including data management, image tagging, e-book publishing, data mining, and Global Service Desk.

iMerit's business framework is based on the unique model of the partnership between Anudip and iMerit. Anudip graduates enter iMerit with a set of valuable, transferable skills as well as an understanding of company values and expectations. Once hired, iMerit employees receive continuous up-skilling as they take on more complex projects in order to best serve clients. This training to employment pipeline helps individuals feel dedicated to the success of both organizations, creating a mentality that helps individuals be reliable and successful iMerit employees and deliver high quality work. The following case study will examine the growth and success of the Metiabruz iMerit center, which is one of the company's most developed IT services delivery centers.



Young women working on in the Metiabruz center.

Five years ago, only 10% of iMerit employees and their families had a stable income. Now, iMerit employees work an average of 25 days per month as members of India's formal employment sector.

History of Metiabruz

Metiabruz is a semi-urban neighborhood located approximately one hour west of Kolkata in the state of West Bengal. Metiabruz is close enough to Kolkata to have an urban and crowded feel but is far enough away to have its own economy and culture. In the 1900s, Metiabruz had a fairly bustling economy due to a highly intensive labor industry in the ports and shipyards. Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers, a large Indian shipyard, still has a strong presence in the area but traffic in the port has slowed somewhat since the 1970s and 1980s. This slow-down has resulted in an increase in unemployment and a somewhat stagnant economy.

In the early 1990s, the area experienced a slight revival with the development of the ready-made garment industry¹. The industry has since grown and West Bengal now is the largest producer of non-branded garments in India. The majority of the garment industry is concentrated in the informal sector of the economy, with independent vendors tailoring, buying, and selling. Much of the work done in the garment industry is very labor intensive and performed by men, leaving few career opportunities for women. The legal cost of labor is cheap in comparison to much of the world, but most employees are not even allowed this small salary and instead must settle for payments far lower than minimum wage².

Approximately 29% of the population of West Bengal claims Islam as their personal religion. In comparison, Metiabruz a predominantly Muslim community, with almost 75%³ identifying as members of the Islamic community. Additionally, the current population has an ethnic mix of Bihari, Marwari, Bangladeshi, and Bengali people and the primary languages spoken include Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali. Together these differences contribute to a culturally rich area with strict social customs and norms.

Despite Metiabruz's close proximity to urban Kolkata, there is a severe lack of educational opportunities available in the area and, until the mid-1960s, there was no high school for girls⁴. This lack of educational opportunities, combined with a weak job market, leaves many women with few options for employment or personal advancement. Additionally, due to strict Muslim customs, very few women are able to leave their neighborhoods to pursue even informal employment. Thus, they remain unskilled, underutilized, and unable to achieve any sort of personal development.

As previously mentioned, India's IT revolution has disproportionately benefited urban areas of the country, leaving other areas untouched by technological advancement. In iMerit's early days, the company began to question why all IT work was concentrated in large metropolitan areas, ostracizing semi-urban and rural areas from the many benefits associated with IT knowledge and formal sector employment. In response, the iMerit team decided to bring IT work to communities that had little previous exposure to the tech industry.

¹ Chakravarty, Ipsita. "THE STATELY PLEASURE DOME." *The Telegraph*. N.p., 14 July 2011. Web. 20 June 2014.

² Sen, Ratna. "West Bengal Garment Industry & the Informatization Process." *Journal of Industrial Relations* 48.4 (2013): 563-82. EBSCO Host. Apr. 2013. Web. 20 June 2014.

³ *West Bengal Human Development Report*. Kolkata: Development and Planning Dept., Govt. of West Bengal, 2004. *United Nations Development Programme*. Development and Planning Department of West Bengal, 2004. Web. 25 June 2014.

⁴ Chakravarty, Ipsita. "THE STATELY PLEASURE DOME." *The Telegraph*. N.p., 14 July 2011. Web. 20 June 2014.

Bringing Technology and Employment Opportunities to Metiabruz

Metiabruz proved to be an ideal place to open a new IT services delivery center based on its peri-urban location and the lack of formal sector employment opportunities available in the surrounding areas. The center began as a fairly small operation but, over the last few years, with the help of hardworking employees, the center has greatly expanded and now employs over 118 women between the ages of 19 and 40 as well as a small number of men. The center is now capable of handling a diverse array of projects such as data entry, data mining, photo editing, digital publishing, and Global Service Desk, which provide employees with many opportunities for growth and up-skilling as they move through iMerit. The delivery center in Metiabruz is the only IT office in the community and the company plans to expand the size of the center in coming years to serve the large demand for employment in the area.

Featured Project: Catholic Relief Services Team

As iMerit has grown in recent years it has expanded its capabilities to include the Global Service Desk (GSD), providing IT application support and customer communication services that can be tailored to the unique needs of different organizations. When iMerit first began offering the Global Service Desk, the company's capabilities were limited to just one coordinator and several technicians who provided services for eight hours a day, five days a week. However, as demand increased, iMerit began to grow the GSD team, training recent Anudip M.A.S.T. graduates with the IT skills necessary for the project. Additionally, iMerit decided to expand the number of employees trained with Global Service Desk skills by incorporating several women from the Metiabruz center onto the GSD team. By dispersing technicians across two different centers iMerit is now able to ensure quality services on a 24X7 basis, expose more employees to the IT skills necessary for the project, and maintain operations even when technological difficulties arise. The current team is made up of a diverse group of experienced technicians and coordinators who work diligently to provide around-the-clock services for CRS offices and staff across many different countries.



From left to right: Faria, Rehana and Sabhia, the three women who work on the Global Service Desk from Metiabruz.

Getting to know the Metiabruz Team

Shyamali is a personable and determined woman who currently works as the Project Lead for iMerit's Metiabruz center. She began working for iMerit in 2009 and has spent the last four years in the Metiabruz center.

Over the years, Shyamali has witnessed the positive impact that iMerit has had on the lives of the women who work in the Metiabruz center. Although it can be challenging to help women adjust to an office atmosphere, she has seen that the growth of the center has made it easier for women and girls to continue their education and pursue careers. She hopes that the center can continue to grow so that more women in the community have the opportunity to earn their own salaries and develop as individuals.

Shyamali's position with iMerit helps her provide for both herself and her parents, who have proven to be very supportive of her career choices. She greatly enjoys working in the Metiabruz center and describes it as, "a good community of women working together."



Shyamali speaking at a conference in California.

Zarin, the Technical Associate at Metiabruz, is a talented employee who exemplifies the idea that women can enter the technology sector in an economically disadvantaged community. Although only 24 years old, Zarin has already held several IT based positions, settling in two years ago to a position with iMerit on the Technical Support Team. She is now head of IT at the Metiabruz center and works diligently to create and install software, assemble new hardware, and address IT issues that arise throughout the workday.

Zarin holds a Bachelor's in Computer Applications and is currently pursuing a Master's in Computer Applications. In addition to her daily duties, she recently designed a software program to improve the delivery results of one of the center's projects. She is eager to delve more into software development and hopes that iMerit can begin to work as a software-testing company in the coming years.

For many of the women in Metiabruz, iMerit is both their first job as well as their first experience with a computer. Zarin's advanced technology skills have allowed her to educate many of the women in computer usage and she firmly believes that iMerit is helping to improve the Metiabruz community, both socially and economically. Zarin's personable demeanor and confidence have helped her excel at iMerit and she will surely contribute to the center as it grows and evolves.

Double Bottom-Line: Social Impact and Quality Results

The unique integrated model of Anudip and iMerit helps employees develop first as students, helping them transition into a career after receiving support and training. This education to career pipeline increases feelings of loyalty within the organization, and most iMerit employees hope to develop their careers within iMerit in the coming years, rather than search for alternate employment opportunities. This has created deep connections among employees and a family atmosphere that permeates the Anudip/iMerit offices, providing constant support and encouragement to all employees. In turn, this loyalty leads to high retention rates of employees and higher quality business outputs. The success of iMerit's Metiabruz center and the social impact it has had on the community is best represented by the following statistics:

The success of the Metiabruz center has led to:

Generational change

Of the women who work in the Metiabruz office, **95% have mothers who do not work outside the home**. iMerit is providing this generation with increased opportunities, slowly changing the gender roles in the community.

Financial independence

For 77% of the Metiabruz women, iMerit is their first experience with in the workforce. In addition to supporting themselves, 67% of the women in the Metiabruz center use part or all of their income to help support their family members. This creates secondary and tertiary beneficiaries that increase the economic health of the greater Metiabruz community.

Financial Inclusion

India is currently suffering from a lack of financial infrastructure (such as banks and loaning agents) and only half of the country's population has a savings bank account⁵. However, **95% of the Metiabruz women have savings accounts**, allowing them to save their paychecks for later use and take out loans for education and home improvements.

125

Total number of employees in the Metiabruz center

22

Average age of a Metiabruz employee

4,150 rupees

(\$67 USD)

Average increase in employee income over the last five years

⁵ Murphy, Neil B. "Just Half Indians Have a Savings Bank Account." *Business Standard* [Mumbai] 28 June 2013: n. pag. Web.

Moving Forward

Although Metiabruz is a unique community rich with culture and tradition, many of its female residents have been limited in both educational and career opportunities. iMerit's Metiabruz center is a monumental step forward towards gender equality and development in the area and creates a way for young women to improve their English, learn transferable workplace skills, and find sustainable employment opportunities in their own community. The women who work in the center believe that it is the best opportunity for girls and women in a community where most women simply become housewives at a fairly early age. Not only do the women gain technical skills and earn salaries, but they are also able to spend time with other women their own age and branch out as individuals.

The social impact of iMerit can be depicted in numbers and statistics, but much of iMerit's impact cannot be quantified. Instead, it must be described. Through employment with iMerit, these young women are able to gain self-confidence, develop an admirable work ethic, and foster their personal dreams and ambitions, in short, they are realizing their human dignity. By catering to the unique needs of the community and respecting the cultural and family traditions of the area iMerit is slowly changing the social fabric of Metiabruz. The jobs, created by the center, are helping to stabilize the community's economy and create a more educated community and the employees at iMerit are paving the way for future generations of women to reach their personal and professional potential.



A group of Metiabruz employees pictured on top of the center's office.

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