Integrating IT into DREAM

Report, Recommendations, and Program Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Because of the cultural and historical barriers that women encounter entering into the work force, generating livelihood for women is a challenging, yet vital, task. The DREAM for Women program, operating out of Kolkata, India, provides women with three months of vocational training for five days each week. Following completion of the course, the women divide into several small, cooperative-style businesses, supported by the DREAM team.

Currently, the members of the DREAM team are working to best utilize IT to support the DREAM program. Introductory computer classes have begun at some of the technical skills training centers for the women and a ten-lesson curriculum introducing computers has been developed to assist this IT integration. DREAM can also integrate IT through developed PR.

BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Employment opportunities for women are limited in Kolkata, India. Traditionally, men have been the wage-earners of the family, while women work at home. In the cities of West Bengal, some women have found opportunities cooking, cleaning, selling produce, or other menial jobs. Recently, more doors are opening for women to continue their education and build a career for themselves through training programs such as Anudip. Most businesses that offer employment opportunities, though, are based in larger cities. Thus, for women in rural areas, creating a livelihood would often require relocating: leaving parents, relatives, and all things familiar. Within Indian culture, familial ties are very important and sustaining family relationships is a priority, making relocation infeasible for most women.

The barriers that stand between women and improved livelihood make intentional job creation for women even more vital. Many rural families live simply, and every bit of income helps fill basic needs. While most women still require permission from their husband to work, wage-earning opportunities empower women, allowing them to contribute financially to support their families and giving them a redefined purpose within the structure of society.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In order to make economic opportunities accessible to women, the Developing Rural Entrepreneurs through Adoption and Mentoring (DREAM) program has provided vocational training to women near their own homes. The program provides the women with three months of skills training in garment production, beautician work, or food processing, depending on their location. The DREAM team then works with the women who graduate the class to help them incubate into several small, cooperative-style businesses. The women work together and divide the profits from their earnings.

The DREAM team has worked hard to organize and start the technical skills classes. Generally, classes take place five days a week for three to five hours a day. The DREAM team works to overcome cultural and logistical challenges: expectations that women stay at home, challenges finding qualified trainers, time dedicated to locating and working with NGO partners, recruiting women interested in the classes at each location, and the strain on the DREAM team to monitor and assist all the centers located throughout West Bengal and elsewhere. Several new training centers incubated in June of 2014 and the graduates are now in the process of establishing profit-making businesses. Recommendations for enhancement of the DREAM program based on observations from visits to four training centers are presented in the following report.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The DREAM training classes are offered to women with a range of educational backgrounds, provided they can pay the 1000 Rupee enrollment fee. Very few continued their education into college; many of them have not even completed year 10 of their general education. The women have little to no foundational understanding of computers, yet they learn about tailoring quickly. The DREAM tailoring training classes follow a series of steps teaching garment production. The trainer sketches the patterns for the cloth on a whiteboard, the women draw them into their notebooks, and then they copy them onto newspaper. They cut out and sew the pieces of newspaper as mock garments before they proceed to use cheap cloth to practice the patterns. After only a few short weeks of classes, women at each of the observed training centers had sample clothing to show for their time. Their dedication to attending the tailoring class, ability to learn the new concepts quickly, and willingness to practice together suggests they could also learn from a basic introduction to the computer. Following are four main recommendations to further develop DREAM as a program.

A Developed Introduction to Computers Curriculum is necessary to document the uniform IT information trainers will teach at each DREAM center. This curriculum has been created and is useful if distributed to IT trainers, empowering them to teach a computer class one day a week at each center.

Continual PR growth and improved general awareness about DREAM are important, both internally, within the parent company, Anudip, and externally, to donors and others with potential interest in DREAM. Case Studies, Center Profiles, and a Program Description of DREAM all contribute to a heightened public awareness about DREAM and its beneficiaries.

Structure for integration of advanced technologies is necessary if DREAM choses to incorporate software use at the DREAM cooperatives. Further computer education and English training would need to be set in place.

 Screening and testing the training method and business model should follow as DREAM develops and changes in the future.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF PROGRAM AND BENEFICIARIES

Case Studies – 1 in-depth DREAM center case study (Diamond Harbor), 3 short DREAM center profiles (Baruipara, Mankar, Probartak Seva Niketan), 1 program beneficiary profile

DREAM Program Description – a two-page description of DREAM's history and the current DREAM for Women program

CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES

Introduction to Computers Curriculum Part 1 & 2 – The curriculum is a trainer's guide of ten computer lessons, including warm up questions, practice exercises, and review questions. The content covers an introduction to the parts of a computer, to basic typing, to Microsoft Word, to Microsoft Excel, and to the Internet. Part 1 is 28 pages, Lessons 1 – 4, and Part 2 is pages 29 to 62, Lessons 5 – 10.

Introduction to Computers Curriculum Handouts – The handouts accompany the curriculum and condense each lesson into a page or two of pictures and brief phrases. The document contains: Handouts 1 – 9 to accompany Lessons 1 – 9, Lesson #1 – 6 Review, Lesson #7 – 10 Review, and a concluding handout.