



1 World Connected
Data-driven Research to Bring Billions Online

DATAMATION FOUNDATION

PROVIDING DIGITAL LITERACY TO WOMEN
IN INDIA



Women at a Datamation training center. Photo credit: Datamation Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Datamation is a nonprofit organization established in 2002. Based in India, Datamation is an educational foundation that links its students with skills enhancement and technology. Datamation focuses on providing its services to women, especially those who depend on informal labor markets. By training students in both basic and digital literacy and offering robust online vocational training in a variety of different fields, Datamation facilitates income opportunities for women in marginalized social communities in India.

Keywords: digital literacy, women's empowerment, India

CONTEXT

Out of more than 460 million Internet users in India, only 21 percent are women according to the Asia Pacific Insight Report. Men are 62 percent more likely to use Internet, and 25 percent more likely to own a subscriber identification module (SIM) card. The gender gap in Internet access and usage varies from urban to rural areas – while 40 percent of daily Internet users in urban areas are women, only 25 percent in rural areas are. Women face multiple barriers in accessing information and communications technologies (ICTs) – not only the economic, but also the cultural and social constraints, according to the *Asia Pacific Insight Report: Women and Technology in India*. The biggest obstacles are the high cost, unreliable connection, and lack of free time. For non-users, however, the report found that lack of interest is the biggest barrier. In addition, a social stigma of women using mobile phones outside their houses discourages many women from accessing the Internet.

Many government- and private sector-led initiatives are underway to promote digital literacy among women in India. As part of the national Digital India Initiative, the Gujarat state government signed a deal with Google India to provide digital literacy training for women and children in Gujarat. Google has also partnered with Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) to implement the Digital Literacy, Safety, and Security program that prioritizes serving the vulnerable groups (women, children, etc.) to not only be digitally literate, but also safe on Internet.

India			
Population (UN, 2015)	1,282,390,303	Fixed broadband subscriptions (%) (ITU, 2016)	1.44
Population density (people per sq.km) (UN, 2015)	390.11	Mobile cellular subscriptions (%) (ITU, 2016)	86.95
Median household income (Gallup, 2006-2012)	US\$ 3,168	Individuals using the Internet (%) (ITU, 2016)	29.5
Education (Mean years of schooling) (UNDP, 2013)	Male: 5.6 Female: 3.2	Individuals using the Internet by Gender (%) (ITU, 2016)	N/A

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Datamation was established in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) global mandate to provide connectivity and technology to those whose social, economic, and/or geographic positions make access to digital culture difficult. Datamation's educational programs are geared toward generating income opportunities for those who are socially marginalized. They put a particular emphasis on educating, advocating for, and protecting women. Datamation's socially engaged technological vision manifests not only in its work in literacy and employment, but also in its "women-centric" curriculum that aims above all at empowerment. The multimedia centers and education

kiosks that make up the Foundation’s brick-and-mortar operations provide opportunities for vocational training and basic education, but also socially motivating assistance, such as help navigating Islamic divorce or domestic violence. By partnering with international and local development agencies as well as private donors, Datamation has built a sustainable model to invest in the education of poor and disenfranchised communities.

Project details			
Technology	Computer training, wireless Internet access	Training	Basic digital literacy, vocational training
Year program started	2002	Cost to users	Free
Geography	Urban -- Delhi and Lucknow	Total cost of program	Undisclosed
User profile	Low-income urban and rural women, members of informal workforces	Associated organizations	Microsoft, UNESCO

PROGRESS AND RESULTS

Datamation has worked to develop its local content in collaboration with the community it serves. Much of the vocational training it provides has been created with input from local community members and intergenerational knowledge.

Around 40-45 percent of participants are linked to a market as a result of their training at Datamation’s resource centers, either by obtaining regular employment or starting their own businesses.

Datamation’s largest centers in Delhi and Lucknow are not only sustainable, but also generate surpluses. The rural centers still require investment from DEF, but Datamation is actively aware of the need for sustainable business models and aims not to rely on donors.

CHALLENGES

Limited and irregular electricity access – Power supply to Datamation’s educational centers is unreliable, particularly those in rural areas.

Lack of Internet access – Internet quality too can be irregular. This problem increases with decrease in population density, as ISPs lack profit incentive to improve their connection in areas with few customers.

Social norms – Datamation engages religious leaders directly in order to advocate for technology and connectivity as a public good. It is important for Datamation Foundation to communicate that they are not endorsing particular political or religious agendas that may have strong online presences nor are they exposing people to inappropriate materials.

DATAMATION’S SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Local content tailored to specific contexts aids training – In this case, local content has been defined according to both regional and class-based criteria. Not only has the curriculum been aggregated from collections of local knowledge, but the centers are also careful to provide a level of content appropriate to the communities it serves. In its rural centers, Datamation provides more simplified and streamlined content to match the literacy levels of the population it serves. In these centers, the instructors play a larger role in the computer-based teaching models that the urban and metro centers share.

Sustainability is linked to fostering a notion of collective development as a community – Datamation notes the importance of establishing both opportunities for education as well as cultural engineering that promotes the notion of self-development in relation to a collective. This collective development is key not only for the success of its students in their studies and workplaces, but also for the sustainable future of the program itself.

SOURCES

Sharma, C. (2017, August 5) Personal Interview.
Project website: www.datamationfoundation.org