

**Salaam Wanita Interactive ICT Tool Development Project
Progress Report
(May – September 2004)**

Research Conducted By

**Organisation : Mothers for Mothers / E-homemakers
Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia**

Research Location : Klang Valley & Ipoh, Malaysia

Date : 18th October 2004

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**Note to abbreviations: RC: Regional Coordinators
KV: Klang Valley**

1.00 Introduction

The Project Leader and Technical partner conducted planning for technical milestones and marketing milestones for the women in the course of carrying out the project.

While the technical team concentrated on the development of the application platform, the project team members initiated production and marketing activities as well as beneficiaries development programs. The marketing/sales was necessary to build an actual client base for the products and services provided by the women. The production (group and individual based) activities are necessary to prepare the women to take up any new challenges that came up in the course of the project.

The activities involved the core ehomemakers team, the technical team and the Salaam Wanita team. Most of the activities had to be carried out simultaneously by all parties. Details of the activities initiated in the fulfillment of the project objectives are expanded on in the following sections.

2.00 Beneficiaries

The regional coordinators interviewed each one of the Salaam Wanita members. Through their observations and analysis a list of interested participants and their related skills and abilities in using any ICT tools as well as their commitment and involvement in other activities within Salaam Wanita was drawn up. Particular attention was also given to their skills and talents in making products and providing services offered. Utilising all the available information, candidates were short listed to participate in the project.

3.00 Acquisition Activities

With the progress of the project acquisition activities had to be carried out to equip the beneficiaries with the necessary tools and raw materials required. This is explained further below.

3.10 Handphone Donation Campaign

The development of the project required that all the Salaam Wanita participants in the project had to be equipped with the necessary tools, handphone with SMS ability.

A program was therefore drawn up to acquire handphones for the women via :

- i. sourcing directly from potential donors by all team members
- ii. putting up an appeal for donations on the E-homemakers website and printed newsletters which were distributed to over 7,000 recipients.
- iii. appeals in the project leader's column in a local daily

The results have not been very good. To date we have received a total of 14 mobile units donated by 10 individuals. 11 units were usable. (Details in Appendix 1) Details of beneficiaries with handphones in Ipoh and Klang Valley are given in Appendix 5 and 6.

Problems encountered in sourcing for handphones was in that trading in handphones, both new and used, is a lucrative trade. People are therefore unwilling to part with their old phones as they lose out on the rebate they would get if they were to trade in their old phones. Further, most view handphones as a non-essential item i.e. as more of a luxury item than a necessity. They do not see how handphones can be necessary tools to help the women to earn income. Hence the poor response.

However, during the implementation period, some of the participants managed to save money to buy old handphones as they see the necessity to be connected so that they could earn an income. The proactive action on their part was highly encouraging.

3.20 Newspapers & Magazines Donation Campaign

One of the main economic activities for the women is the production of baskets using recycled paper i.e. old newspapers and magazines. In order to reduce the cost incurred by the ladies in acquiring the raw materials required, an ongoing donation drive has been launched to source for the required items. This is now being implemented in the same fashion as was done for sourcing of handphones.

The response has been good as the women managed to get adequate magazines to meet the orders received from the few corporate clients secured. (Details in Appendix 1).

4.0 Integrated Tool Development

4.10 Preliminary

Prior to actual development of the tool, a series of in-depth discussions were carried out between the project team and the technical team to determine the needs of the women and the technical inadequacies which may surfaced.

4.20 Actual

Among the topics to be ironed out were the kinds of tools for integration. The initial idea had been to integrate mobile phones, facsimile machines, normal phones and the Internet. Due to the short time allocated for development, testing and initial implementation, it was therefore decided that the development would be done in phases, with the first phase concentrating on the integration of mobile phones and the internet. Other alternatives are also being explored in the meantime.

4.30 Training

A series of training sessions were organized and conducted for both the coordinators as well as the Salaam Wanita participants. For details refer to Appendix 2 - Technical Partner Progress Report.

4.40 Testing

The original pilot development has been completed and the full model is scheduled to be ready for testing by end October 2004. For details refer to Appendix 2 - Technical Partner Progress Report.

4.50 Website Development

Developing an integrated ICT platform requires a website as part of the solution. A basic site was set-up in early September, 2004 to show the women how the application would work. The URL is www.justmarketing.info. The site is predominantly a group marketing site targeted at the general public and the corporate sector. It informs them about the group, their skills and products on offer and other related information. The website is a platform to sell the group's products: used paper baskets/products; cookies/food; typing/.database.

The website also incorporates a separate component to be used purely by the Salaam Wanita women. The site is still evolving and the user-friendly Content management System would be fully functioning by end October whereby the project team can update content without technical partner's help.

5.0 Beneficiaries Development

5.10 Skill Development

During the months of April to early September, a series of skill enhancement seminars on basket weaving and cookie making were carried out. The women were encouraged to work together as a

team. This was all part of the efforts to form cohesive productive clusters among the women in offering their products and services to the market.

Details on the various activities organized for the women are detailed in our website at the following addresses : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=881> and <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=859>

5.11 Basket Weaving (Sep – Aug)

The main product knowledge which was imparted to them in the series of seminars was the production of baskets and other containers from recycled/used paper. The eco-friendly products were thought to be of marketable value.

In the Klang Valley sessions were initially held on March 14 & 28, April 4th. (Details on the sessions can be viewed at : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=768>). In Ipoh the sessions were held on the weekends between March 6th and March 28th. (Details on the sessions can be viewed at : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=769>).

Puan Noraini Md Top from Mawaddah Kraf also provided training for the participants on the art of making hamper baskets from paper on Aug 21 in the Klang Valley (View details at : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=885>) and on Sept 5 in Ipoh (View details at : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=897>). Those interested were to be commissioned by Mawaddah Kraf to make Hari Raya hamper baskets and corporate orders would be secured for those who made quality products.

The Ipoh basket group met every week August to September to make baskets ordered by clients and train each other. The KV group met each week in September to conduct mutual training for the Nestle orders.

5.12 Working From Home

All the participants were given a copy of the eHomemakers' publication 'Working@ home – a guidebook for working women and homemakers'. The book provides basic knowledge on how to go about setting up a home based business.

5.13 IT Training

IT related training was organized for the Salaam Wanita participants at the Yayasan Pendidikan & Vokasional Malaysia in Bangsar, KL. Interested women attended the classes on their own.

5.14 Cookie Baking Demonstration

An order of cookies for Hari Raya was secured from Nestle. The women's cookies were sent to Nestle for tasting. The quality was found to be below par. Nestle, was kind enough to provide training to the women to give them a second chance to prove themselves capable of delivering the desired results.

A demonstration was organized by Nestle at their Consumer Services Kitchen on August 24th 2004. The ladies were taught not only how to bake the cookies but were also given pointers on presentation and packaging techniques. (View details at : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=872>)

5.15 Cluster Work Groups

As most of the women were unused to leading and organizing, the organization of production was led by the Regional Coordinators. However in the interest of the long term development of the women, several women were identified to lead individual work groups and to be accountable for their results.

Sub-group leader development : i) In the Klang Valley Lorraine Leong, a disabled who could weave baskets well, was selected to act as Coordinator cum trainer for the basket weaving group.

Lucy Goh, an SLE patient, was selected to be the assistant Coordinator/trainer. Selection was done based on the Coordinators' assessment of the abilities of the participants. ii) In Ipoh several of the participants are assisting in different ways. Jackqueline Hudson, who has a child with cerebral palsy, assists in the coordination of events and also in sourcing for sponsors. Farida Mohd Noor helps to coordinate the basket weaving groups and monitors the quality of output. Pauline Wong, takes care of her aged mother, helps with coordinating and communication between women and RC. She also assists during events. Tan Pek Imm who has an autistic child assists in transporting products to and from Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur. All of them have the potential to be future leaders within the group.

Problems have been faced by the RC in the selection and training of the women. Petty jealousies and in-fighting among the women on why certain members were chosen to lead have been problematic. The chosen women are also not entirely comfortable in their roles. These problems are currently being addressed through counselling.

5.20 Other Development,

Others areas of the women's lives were given equal emphasis. Due to their circumstances, they suffer from emotional and physical trauma. Many are also de-motivated and have inferiority complex issues. In view of this several other training modules were organized where possible.

5.21 Healing Sessions

The Ann Jones Healing Seminar was organized in Ipoh from 24th June 2004 to 26th June 2004. The lady conducting the seminar was a practitioner in energy healing to help women to let go of their trouble to reinvent themselves. Her sessions were for the general public and non-religious in nature. The ladies who were skeptical about the sessions were pleasantly surprised as they reported that they felt rejuvenated after the sessions. (For details refer to : <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=847>)

5.22 Empowerment training

The tool usage training sessions which were conducted by the Technical partner was integrated with other components. On August 21, 2004, during one of the training sessions, Dr Mark Koh spoke on "Stress Free Living & Loving". He guided participants through relaxation and why they should learn to manage anger. (View details at: <http://www.ehomemakers.net/en/article.php?id=885>)

5.30 Networking

In order to expose the women to the outside world and to encourage them to network, activities were organized to get them together in different locations and different situations. This was to give them the opportunity to network among themselves and also with people outside their normal sphere of acquaintances.

- i. A Mother's day event was organized on May 31st in KL.
- ii. All the Salaam Wanita women are linked with printed newsletter 'Home+ Work' and contests,
- iii. A Maggie factory visit was organized for the SW women on Sept 15 in Shah Alam in the Klang Valley.
- iv. A chat room engine has been set up and tested specially for use by the SW women. (<http://www.ehomemakers.net/forum/chat.php?blang=english>)
- v. A forum mailing group has been created for all the women at: <http://ehomemakers.net/forum/groupcp.php?q=1853>

6.00 Production and Marketing Development

6.10 Corporate Partners Sourcing

The project team has been active in sourcing for buyers and also for potential clients to outsource work to. One major problem faced is in convincing potential buyers and clients that the women can deliver on time and with quality.

RCs have faced problems with women dropping out of contracts at the last minute at the last minute and also with them delivering sub-standard work and expecting payments. These are issues that need to be addressed to make the production-marketing platform works.

6.20 Work Initiated

The project team has been successful in securing several contracts for products and services provided by the women. (Refer to Appendix 3)

6.30 Pricing Activities

In ensuring that the products and services provided by the women are competitive in the market, the project team has been working on compiling and comparing market information.

Market rates for rattan products resembling the baskets/products made by the women were compiled as well as market rates for typing services and cookies. This will ensure that a competitive fee could be drawn up for the products and services offered by the women.

6.40 Commissions

In addition to determination of pricing strategies a commission system has been set out which would contribute to the sustainability of the project and pay for costs incurred by the project team in marketing the products and services. 60% of the retail price goes to the women while the remaining 40% is retained for internal costs and redistributed as follows : 40% to the RC as commission for organizing work, 60% to eHomemakers to pay for the various administrative costs incurred : finance officer's fees, website hosting/maintenance, ingredients such as wires/polish, printing and designing of tags for products. (Refer to Appendix 4 as an exemple).

6.50 Draft Contracts

The platform set up was transparent to the women participating in the venture. They have been informed on the costs by the team and the resultant profits which would be channeled back to them. A draft contract was drawn up to get their agreement to participate in each contract obtained. (Refer to Appendix 5 for a sample of the contract).

6.60 Marketing Activities

In addition to the sales and marketing activities carried out by individual team members, the online platform of 'E-homemakers' and the new site for Salaam Wanita are mobilized for their marketing activities. Salaam Members are encouraged to post their ads in the 'Xchange' section of the E-Homemakers site.

The new site created for the Salaam Wanita group will further enhance the marketing activities being carried out.

6.70 Production Clusters

In organizing the women to undertake large corporate orders, it was found necessary to actively organize them into separate production teams doing specialized tasks according to their individual abilities.

- a. In the Basket weaving team the women who wanted to participate were divided into different groups :
 - a group to roll the newspapers and magazines into the cylindrical forms required
 - a group to mould the base of the basket to be made
 - a group to mould the body of the basket and paint the end products.
 - a team to check on quality

Those with the lowest skill level are in the rolling group. This group is made up of SLE patients (whose skin is affected by medication thus they can't bend/twist wires well), those with chronic illness (eg, kidney and heart problems) and mothers with severely disabled children (difficult to do skillful work when children are very needy). The next skill level group does the 'base' while a small group is still learning how to make the 'mould'. The most advanced women make the baskets from the base/moulds and paint them.

- b. In the typing pool set up there were two distinct groups set up :
- a team to do the actual typing work
 - a team to check on the typing done and to make the necessary corrections on any errors discovered.

Payments for the production team members were apportioned according to the complexity of the tasks carried out. This was made clear to them from the outset to avoid any future disputes.

Attempts are being made to create leaders among the women themselves to lead the groups. A few hitches have been faced due to the different personalities.

7.00 Conclusion

The Project is on track and the women are progressing well in their efforts to learn how to use the new tool. The women find the use of the tool to be relatively easy. The full use of the tool and its efficiency is being gradually built upon. The human development side of the project is much more difficult than the technical development as the disadvantaged women still need to overcome much of the emotional and self-esteem barriers to empower themselves to make production feasible and efficient. As of this date, the team is still building a more solid foundation for the production process so that the marketing platform can function smoothly with the application.