



### Launch of Work 4 Progress Technology Challenge

In order to make new economy entrepreneurship opportunities for young women in rural India, "la Caixa" Banking Foundation in association with Development Alternatives launched "Technology Challenge" (<https://obrasociallacaixa.org/en/internacional/empleo/challenge-w4p-2019/que-hacemos>), as part of our #Work4ProgresslaCaixa initiative.

The technology challenge aims to build an ICT based solution to unlock the lack of connectivity, mobility and safety in workspaces among young women and build a bridge to new economy entrepreneurship opportunities.

The solution will be based on shared infrastructure and an operating platform that, among other possibilities, will create **virtual co-working spaces** with interactive home based access (such as a plug-in communication device for television, local Wi-Fi networks, etc.) where young women can ask questions, exchange ideas, source information, enhance skills and connect to work opportunities in markets beyond their village.

For instance, this could help women gain entry into the workforce through jobs, such as marketing affiliate, beta tester of apps, offline content writing and many more. Also, this will instil a sense of entrepreneurship and make these young women self-reliant.

W4P has adopted and developed prototypes which can form 'test-bed' to gauge the market potential of the technology solution. Some of these prototypes include local information kiosks, safe spaces for women and regional enterprise development coalitions.

By the end of the Technology Challenge, we envision to arrive at a replicable technological model, a Technological Acceptance Model on user experiences, a perception survey on potential of the technology solution and solution design to integrate prototypes like safe spaces and information kiosks.

### **Call for Action**

Women constitute 48.5% of India's population but make for only 28.5% of the labour force compared to 82% of men. Certainly, their participation in workforce is one of the lowest in the world<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, working women are involved in less viable occupations such as home based tailoring units.

Compared to the corresponding national average, the labour force participation rate of women in rural areas of backward states is lower by 9 percentage points. This gap stems out of the age-old traditions of women not having independent access to resources and opportunities.

Thus, there is an urgent need to enhance access to work opportunities within rural communities and build capacity of young women to undertake entrepreneurial ventures without having to necessarily relocate themselves. For this, innovative tools and platforms to overcome socio-cultural barriers and constraints such as lack of mobility, poor connectivity and aversion to risk among the young women and their families are needed.

Innovation in technology enabled by increasing internet connectivity and ICT has shown tremendous potential to bring simple yet transformative solutions to underserved population. Television, for example is one medium, which is easily accessible, and is a major source of information and influence. Its use as a tool for socio-economic development initiatives is, however, largely unexplored.

It is estimated that increasing women's labor force participation by 10 percentage points could add \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2025 (or a 1.4% increase) and lead to significant social and environmental well-being, enabling the country to make a substantial contribution to fulfilment of global Sustainable Development Goals. Unfortunately, current development trajectories do not provide evidence of this happening and there is an urgent need for action, driven by new ideas and innovative solutions to this massive challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Report by World Economic Forum