**Empowering youth through digital skills in Pakistan**

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February 15, 2023

Pakistan is currently experiencing two trends; a youth bulge without productivity and increasing digitization of the economy and society. The trends are anticipated to continue and accelerate in the years to come. The digitization of the economy has vast potential to promote youth employment in the country. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of digital skills for youth to have decent work opportunities. As Pakistan currently has the youngest population in its history (65 percent of the total population is below the age of 30 while 29 percent is between the ages of 15 and 29 years) but a majority of them lack relevant and advanced skills to fulfill the demands of global markets. At the same time, the country has the largest number of freelancers, making it one of the top five countries in the world for providing freelancing services using digital mediums. It is evident that digital skills can generate job opportunities for youth. In fact, the provision of digital skills to youth is more a necessity than a choice.

[Russian Defense Ministry claims 20 Ukrainian drones downed over past day](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2023/russian-defense-ministry-claims-20-ukrainian-drones-downed-over-past-day)

The National Rural Support Programme (NRSP) is playing its role and commitment to supporting digital skills for youth from underprivileged backgrounds in Pakistan. It is implementing the project ‘Revitalizing Youth Enterprise (RYE) through digital and life skills training’ funded by and part of the Citi Foundation flagship programme ‘Pathways to Progress’, a job skills-building initiative that addresses the persistent global issue of youth unemployment. The project has supported 200 poor young boys and girls from underdeveloped areas of four cities including Karachi, Sukkur, Bahawalpur, and Multan, in developing relevant digital skills through 3-month training in e-commerce, digital marketing, social media management, graphic designing, and life skills.

Muhammad Sheeraz Saeed is from Hasilpur, Punjab. After graduating from the Government College of Technology in Hasilpur, with a degree in civil engineering in 2019, he could not find a job. But an online learning training programme has given him two “gifts”; digital and life skills. Sheeraz was one of two hundred young boys and girls from underprivileged backgrounds who took part in three months long ‘Revitalizing Youth Enterprise (RYE) through digital and life skills training’. He was trained in digital marketing because he sees the significance of such skills in job markets. He said that the skills he acquired from the digital skills training project have made him more productive and relevant in the job market. “When I saw this opportunity on Facebook, I jumped at it and applied. I never in my life would have thought that I would have such an opportunity. For the first time in my life, I feel confident in myself. I can now work from the comfort of my home in the digital field without wasting time and money on transportation”.

[Pakistan to welcome investment from UAE: Ishaq Dar](https://www.nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2023/pakistan-to-welcome-investment-from-uae-ishaq-dar)

After completing the training in Canva, Facebook, website development, and e-commerce, he made business accounts and gigs on Facebook, Instagram, and Fiverr. He is now looking for clients on these platforms. For Sheeraz this is just one great step for his empowerment to become part of digital means of earning. He is confident about his success. He was also trained in life skills imperative for dealing with clients and achievement of his plans. Zoofa Sajid is from Chak 143 Murad in Punjab. She has been in search of employment for a long time after graduation in commerce. Continuous rejections and sitting without work at home disappointed her but she never lost hope. She had found a job but was paid very less that was barely even enough for her transportation. She had heard about online earning but never gathered the confidence to step up due to a lack of reliable knowledge, guidance, and skills.

She got to know about ‘Revitalizing Youth Enterprise (RYE) through digital and life skills training’ through her village community organization which provided information and guidance about the training opportunity. When she was selected for the social media management and life skills course, she was over the moon. “It is an era of social media and digital marketing; such skills are required to remain relevant in the job market. I got three months of training on how to make, design, and edit social media posts and videos on canva, and how to get online work, especially on Fiverr.” She had success with finding an international client who paid him in dollars. She thinks online work suits girls and women in Pakistan.

[Pakistan's total liquid foreign reserves reach $8.70 billion](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2023/pakistan-s-total-liquid-foreign-reserves-reach-dollar-8-70-billion)

The training has harnessed confidence and self-belief in her. “I feel super confident about my skills and being independent I cannot explain my happiness. Now, I can plan, manage time and decide how to carry forward my work. I plan to increase my profile and get access to more clients in the future,” she said. The achievements of Sheeraz and Zoofa underpin the importance and inevitability of building a strong human capital through digital skills provision to millions of youth in Pakistan who are deprived. They are the future of Pakistan and she can only compete and sustain in the global markets with the support of skilled youth. Therefore, public and private investments in such skills are necessary to put the country back on the path of development.