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## How Nurul Hussain's Codette Project helps Muslim women get into tech and be successful

*The project aims to create a sustainable economic impact by providing minority women with awareness and access to the tech industry*



The Codette Project team with Nurul Jihadah Hussain (in red scarf)

There are quite a few initiatives aimed at empowering women and providing them with various opportunities, globally. But there are not many that are specifically aimed at Muslim women, who are under-represented in many industries.

Can technology help bring in a change?

“Yes,” believes Nurul Jihadah Hussain, Founder of [The Codette Project](#).

Launched in December 2015, The Codette Project is a non-profit ground-up initiative with a mission to get more minority women in Singapore into technology by building an ecosystem of support, skills training and access. The project aims to have a sustainable economic impact through providing minority women with awareness and access to the tech industry.

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It mainly focuses on three aspects:

1. Skills-building through workshops, hackathons and classes
2. Story- shaping to reclaim the narrative of minority/Muslim women in tech via traditional and social media outreach
3. Community creation through providing a platform for minority/ Muslim women to come together

“The Codette Project is providing better access and opportunity for minority/Muslim women to get into the tech industry, as well as building an ecosystem around success for minority/Muslim women. We are founded on the belief that minority/Muslim women deserve success and that tech will help them get there,” Nurul, who is also a Fellow in the inaugural Facebook Community Leadership Programme, tells **e27**.

The Codette Project is aimed not just at underprivileged women, but all minority/Muslim women, no matter their background. Up to 20 per cent of their attendees are non-minority/Muslim women.

The team conducts regular three-hour workshops covering a wide variety of topics, ranging from resume building, coding, data analysis all the way to UX design. Last July, it also ran Singapore's first women-only hackathon, called Tech for Good, which aimed to create a safe space for women of all

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backgrounds (regardless of tech experience) to come together and create innovative tech solutions to address various societal issues," she says.

So far, initiative has helped around 1,000 women, with more than 500 people attending in 2017-2018 alone.

"Muslim women are incredibly motivated, smart and creative. So many more things can be done to provide concrete support, sponsorship and funding for Muslim women that we need to achieve the equality in social and economic capital that we deserve. The Codette Project has created a supportive environment that is focused on collaboration and empowerment to encourage women to achieve the success that they deserve," Nurul, an MBA from the Singapore Management University, adds.

According to Nurul, one of the key issues that still remains is that there are still too many areas where there isn't any female representation. For example, on panels, especially tech panels, there are still too many that do not have any women, or even if they do, they only include women of a specific background. "We believe that true diversity means ensuring that everyone has a chance, a voice and a seat at the table," she observes.

Anastasia Pavlovic, Co-Lead (Events and Partnerships), The Codette Project, says while it's typically difficult for women to enter the field, it can be incredibly difficult for women of minority/Muslim backgrounds to do the same, given the underrepresentation of minority/Muslim women. "We hope to unlock the potential that minority/Muslim women hold to enter the industry, providing workshops focusing on tech topics, panels to showcase the success stories in the community, as well as encourage more diverse perspectives to improve our world."

Attiya Ashraf, Research Lead for The Codette Project, believes that empowerment also comes through highlighting the minority/Muslim women who are making their mark in the tech industry — by giving them a platform to share their works and experiences. It is an indication to minority/Muslim women that success does not take the shape of a particular gender or ethnicity, and it is within their reach, she says. "Why I feel very strongly for the movement is because as compared to other industries, tech is something that people can learn relatively independently, which makes the barriers to entry into the industry quite low. The tech industry is therefore a potential way in which minority/Muslim women can attain economic empowerment."

Asked if the team has plans to take the initiative to South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, where Muslim women are facing many challenges?

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"There are quite a lot of local programmes for women in South Asia, such as FemProw (Pakistan) and Mumpreneurs India, which I think need to be recognized and supported a lot more, especially as these are ground-up movements with local female leaders. We don't have any plans at the moment to expand our workshops internationally but even if we did, we wouldn't enter these countries as competitors. We would want to work as collaborators with our sister organisations, who are working for similar causes. We really believe in empowering women to do what they choose to do rather than telling women what they should do — women get quite enough of that already," says Nurul.

Although The Codette Project has been backed by Mendaki, National Youth Council, and Facebook, Nurul says the project's major challenge has always been financial sustainability, as most classes are free and rental costs for event spaces are high in crowded Singapore.

How is your Facebook experience helping you in the project? "There has been a lot of learning from Facebook about how to better build communities as well as how to be a better leader. Being able to connect and learn from community leaders from all around the world has been an incredible experience," shares Nurul.

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“Facebook’s recognition has meant a lot to us, as we kept hearing that we were a niche cause, and there were a lot of doubts locally as to the impact of what we do. Being recognised by Facebook has really opened doors because Facebook was willing to recognise us on a global stage, recognise why the work we do is important, and they’ve given us the support that we need to keep doing it,” Nurul adds, wrapping up the interview.