

## Samasource Provides Jobs for Poor Via the Internet

Difficulty:

**DIFFICULT**

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### *Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson*

Today's report is about a non-governmental organization that uses technology to help poor people help themselves. How do they do this? Where is the NGO active? What are some of the benefits of this type of work to those who do it?

### *Extension discussion topics*

#### **A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text**

*Introduction = What does Samasource do? How do they do it? Where did Samasource start?*

1. Give a general description of the work done by Samasource. What kind of company is it? What is their main goal? How do they work toward that goal?
  - They provide computer-oriented work to people in poor areas.
  - They are an NGO. (non-governmental organization)
  - They secure contracts with large technology companies and break them down into "microwork".
  - They have Samasource workers in Africa, South Asia and Haiti.
2. What other details do you remember about Samasource?
  - Its founder and CEO is Leila Janah.
  - It was founded in 2008.
  - Its headquarters is in San Francisco.
  - It provides work to poor people at 16 work centers in Africa, South Asia and Haiti.
3. What are the place names given in the report? What is mentioned about those places?
  - San Francisco: headquarters of Samasource is there.
  - Ghana: place where Leila Janah realized that human brainpower is an untapped resource.
  - India: place where Leila Janah found her inspiration for Samasource, while visiting an outsourcing center while working for a management firm.
  - Africa, South Asia and Haiti: Samasource has work centers there.
  - Bangladesh and Mississippi: poor people deserve our consideration, wherever they happen to live.

## B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = Helping the poor and helping the poor help themselves.*

1. Samasource is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides work to poor people. Do you know of other NGOs that provide work to poor people? Are you familiar with other types of organizations that do this?
2. In your country, who is seen to be most responsible for helping the poor? Is this considered to be the job of the government (through the taxes paid by the people)? Of religious organizations? Of the families of those in need? Or is it a shared responsibility?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of holding government / religious organizations / families responsible for caring for the poor?
4. Do you participate in any organizations or events that help the poor? Why or why not? Do you think this is something that you should do? Or is it someone else's job?

*OR, Topic = NGOs.*

Pick a country that you are interested in and find out about the NGOs that are operating there. What types of work do they do? Do they manage to maintain good relations with the government of that country? Give an oral presentation of your findings to a partner or to your teacher.

## C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

*Topic = Sayings.*

1. This report was about providing people with the tools they need to be able to lift themselves out of poverty. A particular English proverb describes this perspective poignantly: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Do you agree with this proverb? Do you think it could have any drawbacks? Is there a similar proverb in your language or culture?
2. Leila Janah expresses her dislike for charity at the beginning of the report. Here are several quotations or expressions about charity or improving the world. Are you familiar with them? Do you understand them? (Ask your teacher to make sure you have understood.) Do you know some of the people associated with these quotations?
  - Charity begins at home.
  - How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. (Anne Frank)
  - I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do. (Edward Everett Hale)

- The willingness to share does not make one charitable; it makes one free. (Robert Brault)
- If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one. (Mother Teresa)
- Nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something. (Author Unknown)
- The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own. (Benjamin Disraeli)
- It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference. (Tom Brokaw)
- If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. (Dalai Lama)

3. Are there any expressions about charity or helping people in your language? Are any of them surprising when you think about their meanings? Are there any that would be difficult to translate into English, or for someone from another culture to understand?

### *Audioscript*

"I really, I really don't like charity. I think charity does a disservice to the people that it tries to help."

Leila Janah is founder and chief executive officer of Samasource, a non-governmental organization that uses the Internet and the abundance of digital work to employ hundreds of people living in poverty around the world.

"People want to earn their own money and make their own decisions about how they spend it, and I think the biggest tragedy in the development world, the development community, is that we've often dictated to poor people what they should or should not do, and I think it's belittling."

A graduate of Harvard University, Janah has spent much of the past 10 years working in the development sector and visiting poor countries. But it was during her first trip to Ghana, at age 17, that she discovered an untapped resource, human brainpower. Many of the poor children she met were smart and spoke English. They had potential and skills.

"I really flipped my understanding of economic development and poverty on its head, and I realized that we don't live in a global meritocracy."

The idea for Samasource was born later, when Janah visited an outsourcing center in India while working for a management firm. If people from impoverished places could use the Internet to work, Janah thought, why couldn't countless others living in rural areas do the same?

That's where Samasource comes in.

Working from its headquarters in San Francisco, Samasource secures digital work contracts from big technical organizations, and then breaks down large-scale projects into what they call "microwork," accessible to Samasource workers anywhere there is access to computers and an Internet connection.

Tasks can include content generation for websites and data enrichment, such as captioning images and verifying information.

So far, Samasource collaborates with 16 work centers throughout Africa, South Asia and Haiti. Since the business began in 2008, Janah says Samasource has paid more than \$1 million to more than 1,500 people, many of them women.

Much of the violence inflicted against women, Janah says, stems from their inability to earn an independent income. But when women are given computer-driven work, Janah says all sorts of benefits follow.

"They start getting respected for their brains rather than their bodies."

Some criticize outsourcing of this sort as a threat to U.S. economic growth. Janah says Samasource is looking for ways to use its technology to help the increasing number of Americans falling below the poverty line. But she says anti-poverty efforts need a more globalized point of view.

"First of all, I think it's important to remember that a person is a person, wherever he or she happens to live, whether it's a poor person in Bangladesh or a poor person in rural Mississippi, each deserves our consideration."

For the future, Janah envisions growing Samasource into a world-class social business, fostering a family of similar enterprises that employ thousands, if not millions, of otherwise poor men and women, giving them a dignified way to lift themselves out of poverty.

For VOA News, I'm Monaliza Noormohammadi, in San Francisco.