

## WOW – Women of the World Karachi



**WOMEN** PARTICIPATION  
EMPOWERMENT **DEVELOPMENT**  
ECONOMIC **SOCIAL** INCLUSION  
**CULTURAL** EQUITY **GENDER**

### 1. CONTEXT

Karachi is the most populous city in Pakistan, the capital of the Pakistani province of Sindh, and is considered the cultural, economic, philanthropic, educational, and political hub of the country. Karachi represents the most linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse city in Pakistan, a melting pot of ethno-linguistic groups, and home to important cultural institutions and festivals.

The 2018 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index ranks Pakistan at 148 out of 149 countries. Pakistan is also ranked by the Index as 146th in terms of economic participation and opportunity for women, 139th in education attainment and 145th in health and survival. In Karachi,

rapid urban development is causing a range of concerns for women, in particular regarding safe transport and access to public spaces. Serious challenges, including cultural norms and institutional barriers that reinforce marginalisation, hamper the advancement of women as economically and socially active members of society.

## 2. KARACHI AND CULTURE

WOW – Women of the World was launched in 2010 by Jude Kelly (former Artistic Director of Southbank Centre and founder of WOW Foundation) to mark the centenary of International Women’s Day. To date, WOW has delivered more than 60 festivals and reached over 2 million people directly in 17 countries on 6 continents.

British Council helps citizens and institutions contribute to a more inclusive, open and prosperous society both locally and globally. In Pakistan, where British Council was established in 1948, it partners with civil society, government ministries and international organisations to deliver high quality programmes in areas such as youth and community engagement, and women and girls’ empowerment.

In Pakistan, women and girls face gender-based violence, and limited access to justice, healthcare, education and employment opportunities. In partnership with WOW, the British Council organised WOW Karachi as a safe platform to raise awareness of these challenges and provide creative solutions.

WOW KARACHI WAS A COLLABORATION WHERE EVERYONE WORKED TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL OF CREATING A SPACE THAT WAS INCLUSIVE, TOLERANT, AND CELEBRATED OUR SOUTH ASIAN IDENTITY.

## 3. GOALS AND PROJECT

### 1.1. Main aim and specific goals

WOW Karachi brings people together from all corners of society to take a frank look at what prevents women from achieving their full potential. It raises awareness of the issues they face and inspires possible solutions, providing tools to enable change. It contributes to SDGs 5 and 10 in particular.

### 1.2. Development of the project

#### Main actions carried out

In May 2016, Karachi became the first South Asian city to host a full-scale WOW Festival. WOW Karachi 2016 and 2017 brought together exceptional and inspiring women from across South Asia to celebrate women’s achievements, discuss significant issues facing women and girls today, and amplify Pakistani voices. They featured leading female cultural professionals, politicians, community leaders, artists, journalists, activists and entrepreneurs. WOW Karachi developed new partnerships to support creative people to collaborate and experiment with new ideas, building sustainable ways of working and enabling knowledge sharing.

Festival activities consisted of **workshops** on financial literacy, challenging stereotypes and pursuing a path to success in the arts; **talks and panel discussions** covering topics including identity, self-worth, and women in science and the media; **performances** including dance, storytelling and music; interactive sessions for children exploring gender roles; **speed mentoring** sessions; **short stories “bites”** on a wide range of subjects including gender-based violence and heritage preservation, and **screening** of films exploring gender issues.



Ahead of the WOW Festivals, Think-ins took place as a means of engaging local communities to develop meaningful and more representative programming. In 2018, the British Council hosted a large scale 'WOW Karachi Think-in' in preparation for the December 2019 edition. The themes covered included women's roles in cultural sustainability, environmental sustainability, heritage practices, and celebration of women's intersectionality in Karachi.

As a result of the WOW Festivals in the region, British Council developed Creating Heroines, an international collaborative project bringing together female artists, graphic novelists and illustrators.

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#### **Main actors**

WOW Karachi is a partnership between the British Council, WOW Foundation, local female curators and partners.

Curators supported the design and delivery by running training programmes, workshops and courses; by providing digital solutions and advocacy activities; by managing parts of the festival, and by bringing artists and speakers to conduct WOW masterclasses and workshops.

*"WOW Karachi [was] a collaboration where everyone worked towards a common goal of creating a space that was inclusive, tolerant, and celebrated our South Asian identity."* Sara Nisar, WOW curator

Curating partners included: Entrepreneurship and Community Development Institute (ECDI), IBA, Salt Arts, Alternative Marketing Concepts (AMC), Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research

(Piler), Saturday studios, ToffeeTV, Collective for Social Science Research and the Department of Visual Studies, Karachi University.

Supporting partners included: TAF Foundation, L'Oréal Pakistan, Careem, Radio FM91, Standard Chartered, Engro Corporation, Alliance Française Karachi, David & Lucile Packard Foundation and Rafi Peer.

## 4. Evaluation

### Impacts

During WOW Karachi 2017, 40 workshops were delivered, 376 artists participated, 2200 audience members attended and over 6 million people were digitally reached.

Responses from both male and female attendees showed that thinking has become more open towards women and girls and positive responses to the role, value and rights of women and girls increased, showing that perceptions have been challenged and attitudes shifted. 87% said they had a good or great experience, while 83% said they will recommend WOW to others.

In 2018 over 300 local community representatives participated in the WOW Think-in in preparation for WOW Karachi 2019.

**WOW KARACHI CONTRIBUTES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) 5 AND 10 IN PARTICULAR.**

### Recommendations

More community-based activities should take place to ensure greater ownership and engagement with people in rural areas. This is being addressed for subsequent WOWs in Pakistan, as the next one will be in Hunza.

Due to a political shutdown of communications during WOW Karachi 2017, attendance and public relations were negatively affected. The local political context needs to be considered, to mitigate risks and find creative solutions.

Some participants were unable to attend as they could not afford food or travel. To leave no one behind, more efforts should be made to economically support the involvement of low-income communities.

## 5. Further information

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