GSMA™

The Rumie Initiative: Project lessons and outcomes

Grantee:

The Rumie Initiative is a non-profit based in Toronto, Canada. Rumie makes free innovative and authentic learning available for everyone with a mobile device, without barriers. They develop and deliver online digital learning resources to communities with limited internet access.

Project:

The project initially aimed to provide a digital education innovation targeted at women and girls in Afghanistan through a combination of grassroots partnership work and a campaign with Roshan to pre-download learning bytes and onboard 1,500 Roshan users. They had also intended to collect learner survey data from 200 users across four communities in Afghanistan. However, the project went through many adaptations, as Rumie moved away from collation of data/learning to locally curating and creating learning bytes and, due to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the project moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan, forming new partnerships and ways of working.
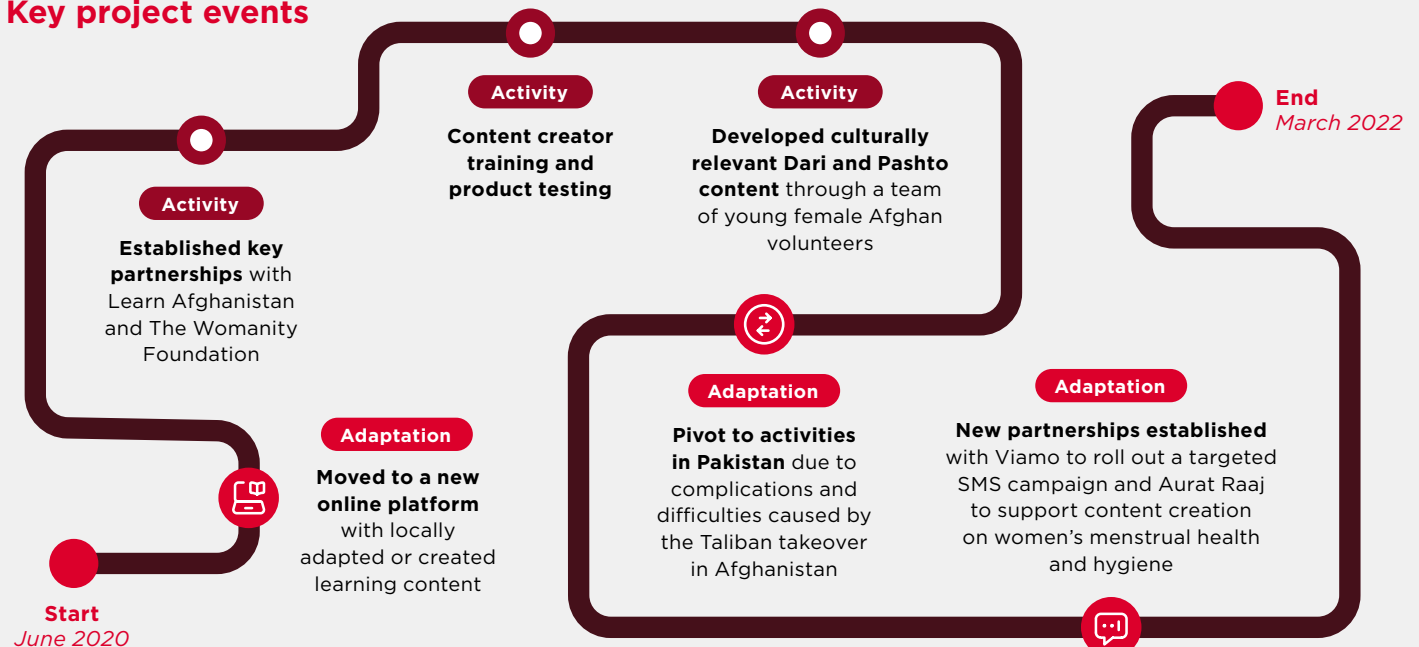
Grant details:

— June 2020 to March 2022

— Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Fund grant of £299,999

Partners:

Learn Afghanistan, The Womanity Foundation and Aurat Raaj as national community partners, facilitating access to volunteers and running targeted community workshops incorporating Rumie's learning bytes. Roshan as mobile network operator (MNO) partner in Afghanistan to disseminate learning bytes to target audiences. Viamo Pakistan as aggregator partner to support survey data collection and share learning bytes in Pakistan.

Grant timeline:
Key project events

Activity

Content creator training and product testing

Activity

Developed culturally relevant Dari and Pashto content through a team of young female Afghan volunteers

End
March 2022

Activity

Established key partnerships with Learn Afghanistan and The Womanity Foundation

Adaptation

Moved to a new online platform with locally adapted or created learning content

Adaptation

Pivot to activities in Pakistan due to complications and difficulties caused by the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan

Adaptation

New partnerships established with Viamo to roll out a targeted SMS campaign and Aurat Raaj to support content creation on women's menstrual health and hygiene

Start
June 2020

Project background

Across the world, access to education in humanitarian settings remains a significant challenge, with women and girls particularly impacted by this global crisis. Without access to quality learning resources that are tailored to the learner and cultural setting, systems of poverty and marginalisation are reinforced and prevent resilience and improved livelihoods. In response to this, The Rumie Initiative developed an online learning platform with 2,100 six-minute learning bytes which are free to access and available to low-bandwidth internet users. This project aimed to grow their Pashto and Dari libraries with high quality, locally relevant and context-appropriate learning content for young Afghan women and men.

Project timeline details

Online platform – Rumie Learn

Initially, Rumie intended to use a tablet with preloaded content and key partners in Afghanistan would then find funding to pay for the hardware. However, a more accessible solution, with less emphasis on hardware, was developed through Rumie's online microlearning platform, which hosts English, Dari and Pashto libraries. This allowed Rumie much more flexibility and adaptability to meet the learning and information needs of the communities they were working with by recruiting national volunteers to create culturally appropriate microlearning bytes.

Established partnerships in Afghanistan

Rumie worked with The Womanity Foundation to establish a volunteer programme to create Dari and Pashto content for the Rumie libraries. Rumie provided online training to volunteer content creators so they could both translate existing content and create new content. In addition, Rumie partnered with Learn Afghanistan to recruit more content creators and developed a skills-building workshop which integrated online learning bytes and face-to-face content.
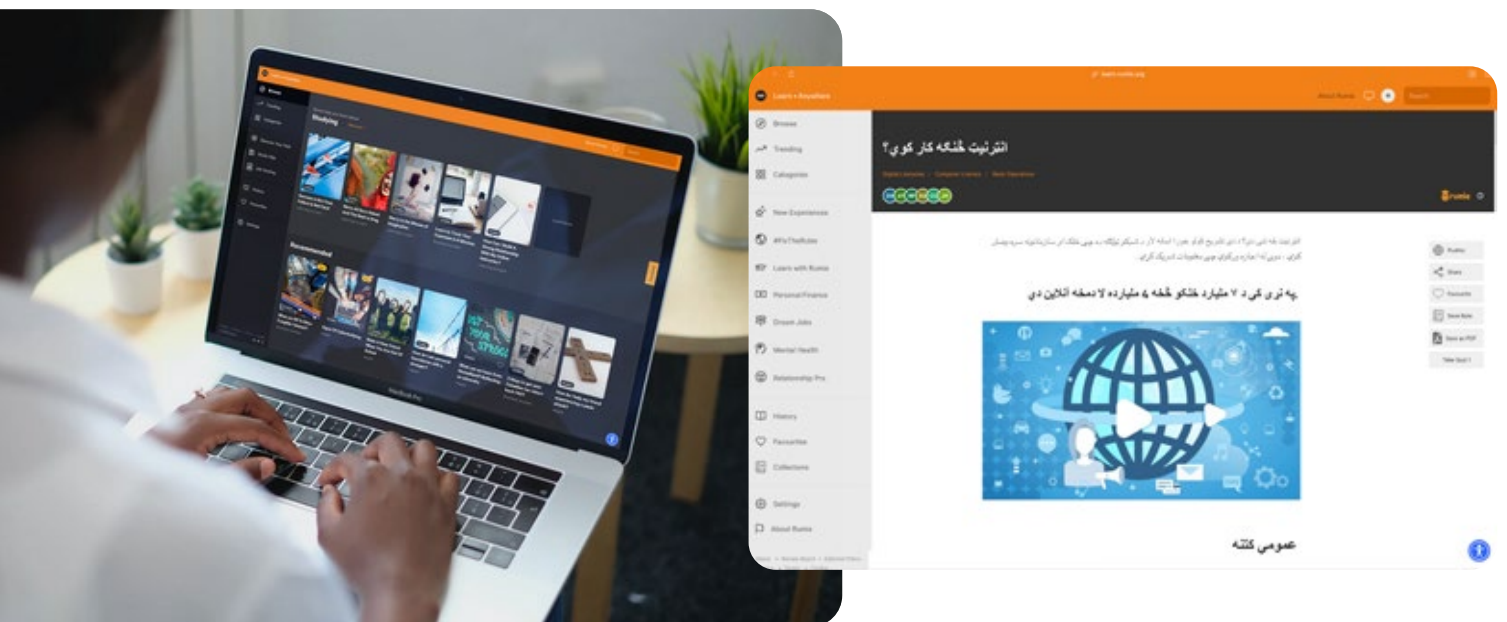
Content creator training and product testing

Rumie provided online training to recruited volunteers through the Womanity Foundation. Originally there were 20 volunteers; this rapidly grew to over 75 volunteers who were all tasked with producing learning bytes. They developed training manuals for content creation in Dari and Pashto and a virtual volunteer programme.

Culturally relevant content creation in Dari and Pashto

Rumie facilitated the creation of 150 Dari and 100 Pashto learning bytes. Through a partnership with Roshan, an Afghan MNO, and Learn Afghanistan, a national NGO, Rumie was on the verge of launching the programme nationally through learning bytes pushed out by Roshan and focused workshops with women and girls in Kandahar by Learn Afghanistan when the Taliban takeover happened and activities were halted.

Pivot to Pakistan

Due to the complications and halt of all aid to Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover, Rumie pivoted the project considerably. The project moved to Pakistan, where Rumie quickly established new partnerships within a three month timeframe. They also maintained online contact with their active content creator volunteer group in Afghanistan.

New partnerships in Pakistan

Rumie formed a partnership with Viamo, a mobile platform provider servicing locations with low technology infrastructure, to develop and roll out a targeted SMS campaign to survey and distribute Rumie content to Dari and Pashto speakers in Karachi, Quetta and Peshawar. They also formed a partnership with Aurat Raaj, a Pakistani social enterprise that creates interactive and engaging technology products and services to educate and entertain girls on health, hygiene and safety. Rumie trained Aurat Raaj's four staff members to use the Rumie Build platform to create learning bytes on women's menstrual health and hygiene through a paid content partnership model.

End of the grant

During the grant period, Rumie was able to achieve the following:

Reached approximately 2,000 Afghan and 42,000 Pakistani users

The libraries are still available to those with internet access

Mobilised over 75 female volunteers

to create content and established a volunteer training programme and pathway for volunteers

Created 150 Dari and 100 Pashto learning bytes,

providing contextualised and appropriate learning resources on life and career skills

Established a tested and scalable partnership approach

and systems to recruit local volunteers, create content and roll out libraries in different geographical locations and in different languages

Project outcomes and lessons

Research finding
The volunteer experience is highly valued

Young Afghan women were overwhelmingly positive about their Rumie volunteer experience. As they are no longer able to go to university or school, this experience allowed them to continue learning and working in information technology (IT), an area they are passionate about. They valued developing learning bytes, learning about technology, translating from English into Dari or Pashto, and learning new topics. Volunteers considered it an important 'lifeline' to keep learning under Taliban rule.

> "Everything has fallen apart, but Rumie still remains… Rumie volunteering is one of the only things we have left."

Content creator volunteer

Outcome
Rumie's partnership model was proven replicable across different countries

The COVID-19 pandemic led to operational adaptations; with no international travel, partnership relationships and trust had to be built online. The partnerships Rumie built were strong and successful, highlighting that online partnership brokerage has the potential to be effective. Using a less resource intensive model was proven to be replicable across different countries. The Pakistan project replicated the Afghan partnership model successfully within three months, confirming it was an effective model for partnerships which could be implemented in a very short amount of time. Partners delivered training to volunteers with online support from Rumie.

Outcome
Users have access to digital education resources that are locally relevant and context-appropriate

Rumie was able to mobilise Afghan female volunteers and create or translate 150 Dari and 100 Pashto learning bytes, providing contextualised and appropriate learning resources on life and career skills for Dari and Pashto speakers and published in the freely available online Rumie library. They also managed to reach approximately 2,000 users in Afghanistan, as their learning platform is still available to those with internet access.

A survey conducted with Viamo in Pakistan found that 87% of respondents (446 of 515) stated they would like to access educational content through their phone. The most popular type of educational content respondents would find beneficial was business acumen, followed by career skills and then health. Through the Viamo targeted campaign, 42,000 users accessed Rumie learning bytes.

Lesson
Content-creation, distribution and transactional partnerships

The success of the content-creation and distribution partnerships model provides Rumie with good evidence for the replicability of the model in different contexts and with different partners. This includes being clear about the roles of partners, mission and vision alignment, and what mutual benefits the partnership can bring. The project also provided examples of how partnerships can provide humanitarian organisations with a complementary and innovative way to reach their target audiences with culturally relevant and important information and knowledge.

Rumie had a different relationship with Viamo than with Roshan. The Roshan partnership was built on relationships without a contractual agreement, leading to delays when key relationship holders moved on. With Viamo, they were able to target geographical areas and audiences regardless of their MNO service provider, quickly conducting an SMS campaign. This provided Rumie with useful engagement and uptake data. The contractual nature of the partnership led to more accountability to deliver on time.

Lesson
Establishing a clear, structured volunteer programme is important

Rumie's Dari and Pashto volunteer community grew during this project. To create an engaged virtual community of volunteers, Rumie had to establish structures and systems that motivated and retained the volunteers. The learning sessions and the creation of the volunteer community were highly valued. Having a dedicated point of contact and 'working hours' provided the structure and support that volunteers needed, alongside consistent communication. The volunteers appreciated the flexibility to choose what they were going to work on and whether they translated or created their own bytes. This autonomy to choose was a good empowerment tool and was complemented by the provision of regular upskilling, certificates of completion and updates to volunteers, providing them with insight on how Rumie's partner organisations were utilising the content they created.
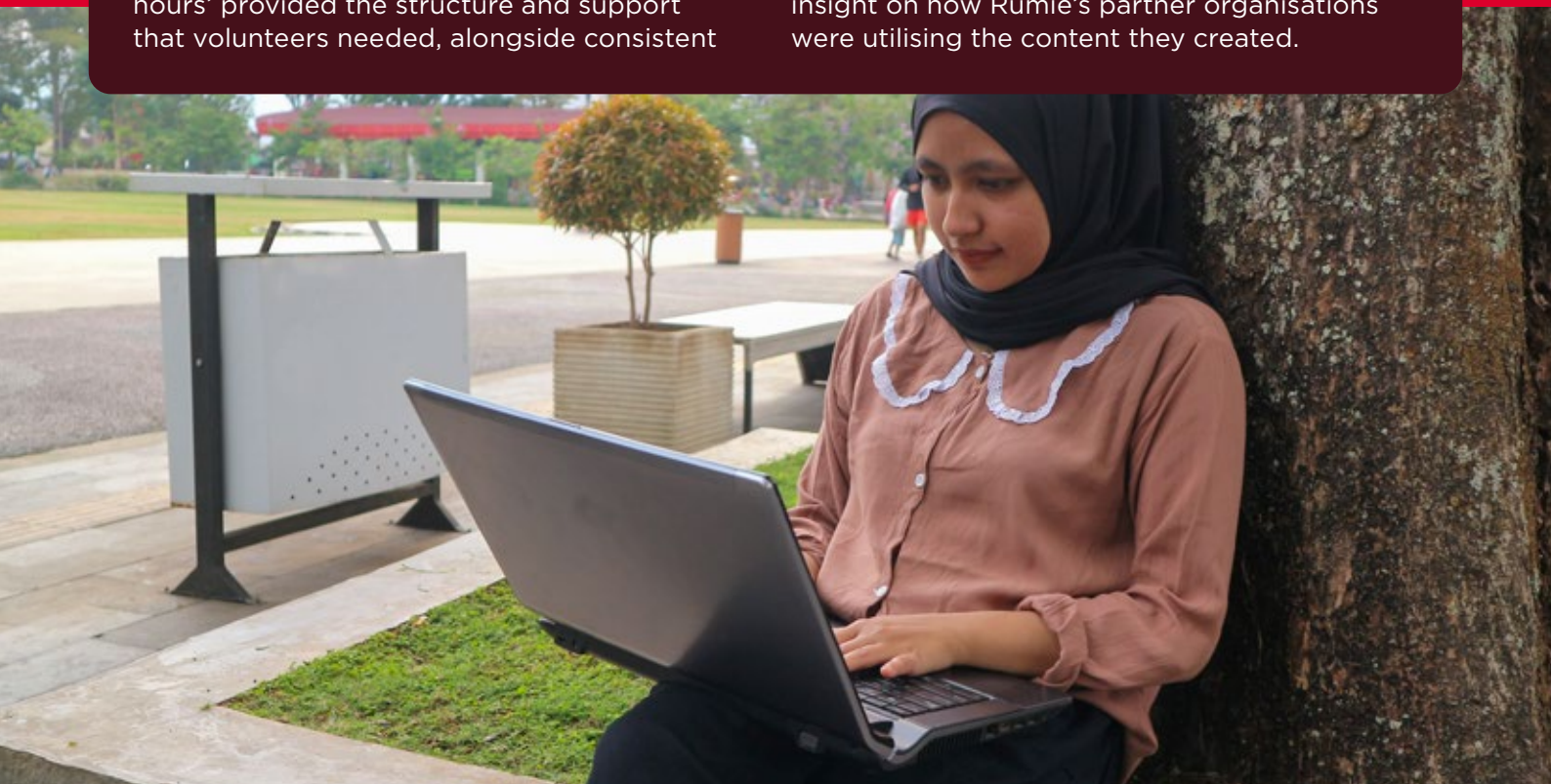
Conclusion

This project highlights how important flexibility and adaptability are within a humanitarian innovation project. Rumie responded to learners' needs by adapting and developing their online platform so that tailored skills-based learning bytes could be uploaded and accessed with an internet connection. The pandemic and the Taliban takeover also led to significant adaptations, such as moving training online, creating an online volunteer community and pivoting to also working in Pakistan. This has led to a wealth of learning on different types of partnerships, volunteer engagement and motivation, and developing culturally relevant learning byte libraries for communities.

"The GSMA has served as a source of support and encouragement for Rumie, and we really value their dynamic collaboration. Beyond the initial grant, GSMA has focused on nurturing our relationship and opening doors to a vast network of partner organisations who share Rumie's mission. Together, we are driving significant impact and fostering social innovation, working hand in hand to bring quality digital learning resources to underserved communities."

– T. Qadir, Director of Partner Success, Rumie Initiative

What's next for Rumie?

Rumie is continuing to grow their Dari and Pashto libraries with locally relevant resources for Afghan learners through their team of Afghan volunteers. They continue to work with Learn Afghanistan to deliver virtual learning programmes for women and girls. In Pakistan, Aurat Raaj used the learning bytes they developed on sexual health and hygiene in workshops delivered to women from different rural communities. Rumie is also developing new partnerships with organisations such as the Malala Fund and the Aga Khan Development Network.

Data sources
- Project milestone reporting and final grant report
- External MEL by The Research People including a volunteer survey (27 respondents), analysis of the Viamo survey (542 respondents) and three KIIs with active volunteers