



Gaza Sky Geeks Mid-Year Report

Crowdfunding Sparks Global Support for Gazan Startups

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\$202,058 USD
raised by **842 people** in 2 months

289% funded No time left

Verified Nonprofit
\$70,000 USD goal
Flexible Funding

CAMPAIGN CLOSED
This campaign ended on January 19, 2015

In November 2014, as Gaza Sky Geeks' (GSG) original funding from Google.org came to an end, the GSG team ran a crowdfunding campaign to garner the support needed to grow Gaza's budding startup movement. The #GazaStarts campaign became a huge success:

- ▶ The largest crowdfunding campaign the Arab world has ever seen
- ▶ Raised a total of \$267,000 in critically needed funding
- ▶ A global effort - 853 donations were received from 60 countries around the world
- ▶ Most donations were \$60 or less - every individual gave as much as s/he could
- ▶ USA and the Middle East contributed the most (45% and 44% of total raised, respectively)

The funds raised from this campaign will sustain GSG at a bare bones level through the end of 2015. They have already allowed GSG to run one major outreach event and a program to support female startup founders. #GazaStarts was the first step in Mercy Corps' strategy to diversify funding and ensure GSG's sustainability.

Want to continue your support of this program? Visit www.gazastarts.com to give.

Successful New Approach Grows Startup Pipeline

The Challenge:

Because the Arab world is facing unusual opportunities in tech entrepreneurship (e.g., Arabic is the fastest-growing language online) new investment funds are available for products that serve Arabs. However, investors all face a similar challenge: the lack of a “pipeline” of investable startups. Potential entrepreneurs do not have the knowledge or support needed to develop their startup ideas to the level investors seek; their raw talent goes untapped and they remain jobless.

Our Solution:

GSG experimented this spring with a new approach to growing the quantity of investable startups in Gaza: we ran an intense pre-acceleration program for new teams we identified as having high potential. We provided training on startup essentials (“Lean Startup” methodology) and incentives to launch and test a prototype in just two months.



The Results:

- ▶ **GSG is in high demand** - Over 700 teams applied for the 20 spots in our pre-acceleration program
- ▶ **GSG’s new approach worked** - In just two months, 15 teams have qualified to pitch to investors



“I was astounded by the talent in resource-starved Gaza. I’ve traveled to 45 countries in the past 4 years looking for purpose driven startup founders to help them grow globally. The early-stage talent in Gaza rivals the talent around the world.” – Fadi Bishara, CEO of Blackbox VC in Silicon Valley

Lessons Learned: In 2014, GSG’s first year as a startup accelerator, startups were selected based on their ideas and pitches. We have since learned that it is more important to select the top entrepreneurs, regardless of their ideas, because the original concept will need to evolve multiple times before it succeeds. GSG now seeks founders who are dedicated, hardworking, adaptable (listen to feedback and rebound from failure), and deeply committed. This year, GSG ran a five-day bootcamp that enabled us to select the top teams we would then support with our pre-acceleration program.

More International Mentors in Gaza than Ever Before



GSG plays the crucial role of connecting Gaza's startup founders to experts from around the world. We are the only organization that brings mentors from Silicon Valley, Europe, Dubai, and elsewhere to Gaza. Between March and June we brought 16 mentors, more than ever before... and all of them paid their own way! Our participants say this expertise is one of the most valuable services GSG provides.

Women's Program Builds Confidence of Female Founders

In spring of 2015, GSG ran our second program designed to boost the skills of female startup founders. Women are strongly represented in GSG's activities (49% in 2014, a big jump from 27% in 2011-2013). Our goal is to ensure that they not only participate in events, but also found companies. In the 2015 pre-acceleration program, 25% of the founders were women.

We have learned that female founders benefit from a women-specific community and confidence-building workshops. So far this year, GSG has held 11 workshops targeting women (covering diverse topics including the power of networking and public speaking). GSG invited every woman currently in an incubation program in Gaza (22 women participated regularly).

GSG has found that a key barrier to female participation is lack of family support, and that this barrier is easily addressed by engaging families (e.g., calling parents to explain the program) and providing small stipends (\$50/month allows women to participate without asking their families for support covering their transportation costs).

What we are hearing from participants:

"It made me stronger. It taught me how to be a leader."

"I discovered a community of girls who want to change things for the better."

"I learned not to stop if I fail. I need to work hard to be who I want to be."



Up Next at GSG: Our 2015 Plans



- ▶ **August:** The best pre-accelerated teams receive investment offers from GSG's investment partners
- ▶ **August:** Our fundraising team kick starts its campaign to raise \$2.2M to run GSG over the next 3 years
- ▶ **September:** Invested teams begin acceleration
- ▶ **October:** Startup Weekend, our largest annual outreach event, takes place October 8-10
- ▶ **February:** Acceleration ends, regional demo day

In the News: GSG's Recent Media Coverage

"A Startup for Geeks in Gaza" (July 24, 2015, Nicholas Kristof blog) **The New York Times**

"Creating a Tech Hub in Gaza" (June 30, 2015) **BloombergBusiness**

Regional updates: What's New for Arab startups

Tech Stars opens branch in Kuwait - one of the top global startup accelerators will expand into the Middle East region in 2015

Yamsafer receives \$3.5B Series B - Palestinian startup receives large follow-on investment from top European venture capital fund

Talabat acquired for \$170M by Rocket Internet - the largest acquisition in the region to date

About Mercy Corps' Gaza Sky Geeks



Gaza Sky Geeks

Gaza Sky Geeks (GSG) is a startup hub, incubator, and accelerator in Gaza. Our mission is to transform Gaza's most talented youth into successful startup founders who realize their own potential, create jobs, and contribute to the Middle East's development as a modern business hub.



Gaza Sky Geeks is a part of Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian aid organization, 4,000 strong, powered by the belief that a better world is possible. We help people survive and get back on their feet when natural disaster strikes, economies collapse or conflict erupts. For more than three decades, we've learned and grown alongside extraordinary people – more than 170 million individuals who understand their own needs better than anyone else. We believe that even in the world's most challenging places, people have the power to transform their own lives when they have the right resources.