Technology and social change

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In the 21st century, technology is medium, media is access, access is empowerment, and empowerment is rights and democracy. In the nine years since the annual Manthan awards began and in the three years since the mBillionth awards began, we have accumulated more than 5,000 case studies on how people are innovating and using information and communications technology, mobile phones and the digital media for social and economic empowerment. Below are a few examples:

Case 1: The increasing cost of tuberculosis (TB) treatment is a serious concern in India. Funding requirements have grown 16 times. And instances of multi-drug resistance tuberculosis are rising. Therefore, monitoring the intake of medicines by TB patients for six to nine months is essential. Operation Asha's eCompliance programme created a biometric identification system to monitor tuberculosis treatments through verifiable tracking, while coordinating phone text messaging-based technology for collecting records into a digitized system.

Case 2: To better serve workers at *anganwadis* (day care centres) and child development project officers (CDPOs)—who help with healthcare issues related to newborns, pregnant women and nursing mothers in the villages—Andhra Pradesh Foods (A.P. Foods) created the mFoods project, which provides a centralized system via mobile phones to track the date and time when food is purchased or delivered and other nutrition-related activities. The system connects 91,000 *anganwadi* workers and 223 CDPOs in real time, benefiting about three million children and women in the state.

Case 3:*Mera Swasthya—Meri Awaaz* (My Health—My Voice) uses an interactive voice response system that allows women in Azamgarh and Mirzapur to lodge complaints through mobile phones against public health centres that charge for providing government-mandated free services. About 140 complaints were registered in the past 6 months.

Case 4: Hamsa International has created a mobile application for people to find the nearest public washrooms, categorized by gender preference and ratings based on cleanliness, quality of services and cost. The information is shared on a website and with government department in every city.

Case 5: The Women's Organization for Socio Cultural Awareness has developed a mobile-based monitoring system—Tracking Entitlements for Rural Communities—to track three social schemes: the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Scheme, public distribution systems and pensions. The system has helped 542 villages and 87,000 families by increasing their access to public services. As a result of this system, the government has seized 4,854 fake PDS (public distribution system) cards so far.

Case 6: About half of India's 1.2 billion people are digitally challenged blue-collared workers, many of whom are semi-literate. They spend much time and money on travelling to search for jobs. NaukriSMS provides a platform that brings together such workers and their potential employers as well as skills training providers through mobile phones.

Case 7: HandsofIndia deals in artisanal products made using natural materials like bamboos or fibre. Its Facebook page is lively, visually enriching and has about 1,600 members. The page allows for placing orders, showing products, and provides information about events and exhibitions. HandsofIndia says a majority of the 2,200 products they sold this year was through Facebook.

These and hundreds of other such initiatives will be on display on 21 July in Delhi at the mBillionth Award. Besides, along with the Vodafone Foundation, we will also announce Rs. 40 lakh for four non-profit bodies that use the mobile phone platform innovatively for social impact.

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