

Story of Muthyalammapalem : Capturing the promise of ICT in remote Andhra village

India has become one of the most prominent mobile markets in the world. Perhaps the best tool for poverty alleviation on the continent is the mobile phone. Every now and then, India gets a stark reminder that the feel good factor created by high growth rates in recent years eludes millions of its people. Poverty in India is still ubiquitous. The policymakers and mainstream media tend to forget that in all this talk of India Shining, that our development project is still very incomplete.

This interesting walk takes you on a tour around the Muthyalammapalem, one of the poorest villages in Andhra Pradesh. There are 454 fishermen families with 1840 population. The IT revolution has bypassed villages like Muthyalammapalem.

Andhra Pradesh, a city struggling to cope with rapid growth on the back of a vibrant IT industry, is still growing. Luxury towers in mid-construction are sprouting, with billboards advertising helipads for aspirational – and wealthy – tenants. The traffic is hellish as three-wheeler auto-taxis, cars and buses compete for space amid a cacophony of klaxons. But, the story of villages like Muthyalammapalem shows stark inequalities - often along caste, religious and gender lines. And in some ways, this has become a vicious circle.

As per mythology, the villagers of Muthyalammapalem turn the bottom of their cot (bed) upward. They believe that if they don't follow it, the person sitting on the cot can die during rituals. There is also superstition of animal sacrifices during worship of god. The villagers believe that such rituals and animal sacrifices for the goddess will bring prosperity.

Despite Andhra Pradesh IT based expanding economy, the fruits of rising wealth—and opportunities for economic and social mobility—have largely bypassed many rural areas like Muthyalammapalem.

The truth is that out of 454 families, 453 families are below poverty line. Fisheries contribute to their livelihoods. As per official data, in this village total 421 people are involved in fishing, 154 women are involved in selling fish and 66 women are daily wage labourers.

As for as education is concerned, in Muthyalammapalem 197 males and 155 females have attained primary education, 239 males and 151 females have attained secondary education. Only 1 person of this village had a college education. The biggest surprise is that none of the villager is technically educated. As a result, they are unable to understand television weather forecasts. Traditional fishermen in Muthyalammapalem shared us a similar lack of weather information from the government.

A fisherman in this village said some days he travelled two kilometers from his home to the river estuary only to return empty handed after unexpectedly bad weather made the sea too choppy to catch fish. He made the journey several times, wasting two liters of diesel fuel per round trip, until the weather was at last safe enough for him to go to sea. Another fisherman said he had no other way to check the weather except by visiting the estuary himself. They never received any information about official weather forecasts as a traditional fisherman.

In Muthyalammapalem village, some non-government organisations and businesses are becoming increasingly concerned about the level of digital literacy in Muthyalammapalem communities. Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is trying to engineer advancement through this vast and growing affirmative-action program. Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) had come together to form, the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) by making 1 member per household Digitally Literate. NDLM is an ecosystem of digital literacy awareness; education and training that helps such villages take a lead in the global digital economy and also shape a technologically empowered society.

On 22 December, 2012, Intel & DEF inaugurated the Muthyalammapalem NDLM centre and trained 350 villagers with basic computer skills. Being the first digital literacy programme launched in Muthyalammapalem located at Pravada, Visakhapatnam majorly populated with fishing community DEF has started two batches started with Intel Easy Step programme.

Just few years back, Muthyalammapalem villagers had never seen a computer. It was an alien piece of furniture in their lives. Today, these NDLM centres are empowering villages with information on weather and crops. Villagers believe that they now have a new weapon in their hands to fight poverty. It comes in the form of National Digital Literacy Mission which provides local people an interface with the outside world. For instance, fishing communities can get information on wave heights 48 hours in advance which is then can be broadcasted through a public address system.

This campaign has encouraged youths to consider how the application of ICT can improve their lives. Some stories are testament to the success of NDLM which is providing young Indians with the skills demanded by the modern workplace, whether that is as an employee of a company or by empowering them to be successful innovators and entrepreneurs.

Chintakala Muthiyalu is 20 Years' old Auto Driver and educated 10th standard. His father is also a fisherman. He says, "Today, I help other people in my area become digitally literate".

Improving digital literacy in communities is also critical to developing local commerce, enabling it to keep pace with the world's ever evolving economy. For example: **Vasu Palli Janaki** is 16 Years' old girl who has just passed 10th standard. Her life was changed through her participation in the NDLM program. The resources and mentorship she received throughout each module of the program helped her establish a firm grasp of digital knowledge. The interactive, hands-on methods used by the teachers helped her overcome her fear and learn skills quickly.

As such, she not only developed computer skills but the course also gave her the opportunity to acquire mentorship skills through his volunteer role as an assistant facilitator in class. She utilized his knowledge to become a part-time tutor. She helps members of community acquire the computer literacy that they need to live in a digital world. Her passion for learning led her to seek a job. Another beneficiary is Ganagalla Devi (18 Years old and does tailoring). She wants to start a business with the help of her digital knowledge.

Today when ICT is recognised as the catalyst for breaking barriers, the digital divide keeps the power of ICT out of reach of a vast majority. The challenge therefore is to employ technology for ushering in rural-

urban equity. Programs such as NDLM are helping to bridge the 'digital divide' that restricts the opportunities for underprivileged and rural students in Muthyalammmapalem.

As sustainable development rises up the global business agenda, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there is no beating a better future than by helping the emerging rural market "log on" to the benefits of knowledge and technology.