



Wireless for Communities & Open Spectrum Summit

In Manthan Award 2013, there will be a special annual summit on how last mile connectivity through low cost wireless networking can and is making illiterate and poor people thoroughly empowered. It is a summit to discuss live cases from across India, Asia and other countries.

Considering that we are in the twenty-first century, which is defined as era of information economy, it is the information infrastructure that becomes benchmark for any country's development. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate how much of available digital medium do we use for information production and consumption in any country, and how many of its citizens have access to information infrastructure. And the only ray of hope in India is that it has significantly progressed and leapfrogged to have very encouraging numbers for mobile penetration – the last count was 861 million in June 2013. Yet, for the rural population of India, which constitutes no less than 70 percent of Indians, even the mobile penetration in absolute terms is less than 30 percent.

On the other hand, there are existing provisions like free spectrum allocations as provided by the government that are not being utilised to provision information and media infrastructure, reaching out to unreached communities. Globally, and in India, frequency bands in 2.4 GHz, 5.8 GHz and 3.3 GHz have been kept aside as free spectrum that can be used by anyone without taking a license or paying a fee to the government.

In the last one year, DEF has also introduced wireless-based Internet connectivity using unlicensed spectrum (free spectrum) for the CIRC's and its allied NGOs and SHG groups. The impact is overwhelming; stakeholders is not only connecting remotest regions such as Mandla (Madhya Pradesh); Tura (Meghalaya), Tilonia (Rajasthan), Giridih (Bihar) and other regions of the country but also attracted the attention of stakeholders, including policy advocates, government and private players to adopt the wireless technology as an alternative solution towards connectivity and access.

