

Garden youth to bring internet twilight to the tea gardens in Assam

New Delhi, May 12, 2022: Assam's tea gardens have been long ignored by the internet service providers due to the high infrastructure cost and the low-profit anticipation. However, a collaboration between Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and the Internet Society (ISOC) is set out to bring affordable and fast internet to the gardens through Community run Internet Libraries (CILs). The CILs will be run by fifty youth selected from the community who will be drawing operational insights from DEF's unique model of SoचनाPreneurs, a social enterprise model that charges the community a minimal amount for the services and access to information. So far, thirty of such SoचनाPreneurs are prepared to spearhead the CILs that will be set up by XX, date.

The tea tribes of Assam are a total of 6.5 million people who are descendants of Adivasis largely from the Chotanagpur region in present-day Jharkhand of India, brought by the British Raj as indentured labourers in the mid-nineteenth century. The penal contract system introduced by the colonial administrators in 1865 empowered the colonial government to control and coerce the labourers to work, to arrest and imprison them if they wanted to leave the plantations. The specificity of this ethnic history and the economy of plantations continue to impact the lives of the new generations of the plantation communities in Assam. A study done by Oxfam across 50 tea plantations in Assam finds that the average daily wage of the tea workers is between 137 and INR 170 (USD 2 – USD 3) a day. The initial engagements with the community prior to the project also show anecdotal evidence of severe Anemia in the gardens. The community engagements also revealed that the majority

of the people interacted with had no or little knowledge about the government access points or the [Srish Portal](#) (an online portal by the Assam tea board). Prior studies done by DEF have also found that only nine out of the twenty-five gardens surveyed had internet speed below 512kb.

The CILs will serve as the access points for Srish portal, other e-governance related services and banking services. Further, the trained youth will also aid the community in meaningfully accessing the internet, sharing critical information on community development and providing affordable and fast browsing of the internet.

The Internet has been a liberatory idea in rural India where they feel connected to the world, share and learn about their rights and access critical information to confront generational discrimination. DEF and ISOC will hand over the project to the community in 2023 through the community SoचनाPreneurs who would continue this program through a self-sustaining model.

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Notes:

Digital Empowerment Foundation DEF is registered as a not-for-profit organisation under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860, to carry out this mission of empowering people digitally. DEF constantly acts in the creation of information empowerment, and equitable communities by providing digital access to information, knowledge and contextual capacity. Details at <https://defindia.org/>

The Internet Society supports and promotes the development of the Internet as global technical infrastructure, a resource to enrich people's lives, and a force for good in society.

Their work aligns with their goals for the Internet to be open, globally-connected, secure, and trustworthy. They seek collaboration with all who share these goals.

Details at <https://www.internetsociety.org/>