Background

The Indian experience of digitalization has been very unique, which was further catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, however this was followed by its own set of challenges. Internet penetration has considerably increased in India, but rural spaces in India remain largely unconnected. Rural population is still unserved or underserved, creating another layer of digital divide. Due to unreliable electricity supply, unaffordability, demographic and topographic challenges, and the high cost of infrastructure, rural India faces challenges in even securing access to functional internet and various digital devices. The lack of access to the internet also translates into lack of awareness related to government schemes and entitlements, low digital literacy rates and poor usage of various digital applications and tools.

The rising levels of digital interventions are noteworthy; however, the bottom layers of the pyramid still remain uncovered. According to the Gandhian policy- “The true measure of a digitally inclusive infrastructure can be found in how it would treat the most vulnerable members of society”.

Need of the Project

To prepare the communities for digitalization, it is a must that people come together to create opportunities and learnings around digital literacy. Factors such as location, income, age, sex, ethnicity and disability are significant factors that act as a hinderance towards digital literacy and inclusion of all. Digital literacy has become an indispensable tool for people of all age group to succeed in the professional sphere. Digital literacy will eventually promote the digital financial inclusion among the communities. For this there is a need to create digitally integrated ecosystem Digital Excellence Center where people leverage digital tools to bring efficiency in daily lives, transparency in governance, economic prosperity for households, social cohesiveness, and ease of access to various kinds of services and information and young girls and boys come together and develop scientific temperament, which can be achieved by STE(A)M training at an early age. This further helps in breaking the barriers related to gender, superstitions and promoting the growth and development of individuals. COVID-19 pandemic showcased how rampant the issues of fake news and misinformation are, to give community the understanding of cross checking and verifying information is one agenda of the DEF.
Baseline Report

A baseline survey of 500 participants from the Chanchalguda community in Hyderabad, Telangana was done over a period of two months. The baseline had very informative tools like community meetings, focused group discussions, one to one conversation and survey. Major findings of the baseline are-

- Community has understanding of the digital payment tool but lacks knowledge and application as to how use them for daily needs. There is a fear associated with digital mode of payment.

- About 80% of the community is unaware of the various government entitlements and social security schemes.

- Youth of the area want access to resources where they can learn about various digital tools and interventions, which increases the chances of their employability.

- Young girls and boys are keen to learn about scientific interventions which can be helpful in their higher education.

- Senior citizens have mobility issues hence they aspire to have an access to a center which can help them with Aadhar card, pan card and various pension schemes and entitlements.

- Majority of youth in the locality are unemployed because of lack of job-oriented computer training, knowledge and skills.
The outcome of the survey determined the implementation of digitally integrated ecosystem **Digital Excellence Center**. Digital Empowerment Foundation with support US India Policy Institute (USIPI), Equally Able, Accenture, Donalson Foundation, Quest Alliance, IBM, EMpower, Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge (TASK), WE Hub and Centre for Development Policy and Practice (CDPP) inaugurated an initiative called **Digital Excellence Center** in Chanchalguda in the heart of the Old City of Hyderabad, Telangana. This is a state-of-the-art center that will provide access of Technology, entrepreneurship and market access to the especially abled, the vulnerable and the marginalized population. Additionally, there is also a strong effort to create and nurture women entrepreneurs among Muslim populations. The center facilitates the following services:
• Digital literacy and skilling & entrepreneurship services
• SoochnaPreneur Center- offering digital services to masses
• Makerspace for activity-based learning including coding & digital innovation
• STEM center for thinking-based learning
• Special digital center for people with disability
• Digital repair, and recycle & reuse center
• Media & information literacy center
• Fighting misinformation and fake news
• Digital center for women empowerment
• Digital library & knowledge center
Objectives of the Digital Excellence Center

• Broaden experiential learning at grassroots level and enhance rural innovations through exploring interests in science, technology, and creative arts.

• Understand the concepts and application of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics)

• Inculcate curiosity, analytical skills, design computing, mathematical and team working skills.

• Leverage design thinking approach for identifying real time community problems and creating tangible contributions to rural and semi urban development.

• Identifying the underserved communities and digitally empowering them.

• Inculcating the practices of safe digital process in finance, education and empowerment.
Inauguration

Digital Excellence Centre was inaugurated on 20th August 2022 by eminent personalities of the Telangana government and community elders. Mr. Jayesh Ranjan, IAS, Principal Secretary of the Industries & Commerce (I&C) and Information Technology (IT) Departments of the Telangana Government, the Chief Guest on the occasion inaugurated the DEC, just opposite Markazi Anjuman-e-Mahdavia (MAM). Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC), and TASK Centre Chanchalguda, Hyderabad. Mr Osama Manzar, Founder and Director of Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), Dr. Amir Ullah Khan, CDPP, Mr Shrikant Sinha, TASK CEO, Mr Syed Ali, Board Member of USIPI, Mrs Deepthi Ravula, CEO, WE hub and Nahid Jubair, DEF Deputy Director and local community members were present during the inauguration.
Official Visit

On 28th September 2022, DEF’s senior team members along with board members visited the recently inaugurated Digital Excellence Center in Chanchalguda and also met with district public library officials.

Amitabh Singhal, Shalini Kala, Madan Rao, and other team members interacted with the beneficiaries of SochnaPreneur, CIRC (Community Information Resource Center), STEM Center, Digital Green Prakiya Center, TASK Center (Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge). Emphasis was laid on how to mobilise the community so that they use these centers and resources for overall growth and development.
The center offers a host of programs for different sections of the community

**SoochhaPreneur and CIRC**- The center serves as a hub for various governance and financial services for community people. The list of services provided here are- various schemes enrollment, Aadhar & PAN card registration, deposit and withdrawal of money from banking correspondent.

**MakerSpace**- This space provide young minds to innovate and excel in the field of STEAM. Young girls and boys, people with special needs enroll here to learn and experiment about various scientific interventions. This provides a platform for girls to learn about STEM.

**TASK**- Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge, an initiative of Department of IT E&C, Govt of Telangana. Initiatives from TASK are majorly focused around enhancing employability quotient for youth that includes three key- skill dimensions, personal skills and technical and
organizational skills. The engagement aims to skill the Telangana youth in the latest technologies to meet the industry requirements and essentials of the 21st century workplace, making youth adaptable and employable. Various short term skilling programs are—tally accounting software, python programming, database and SQL.

Digital Green Prakriya Center- India is the third-largest e-waste generator, producing over 3.23 million metric tons of e-waste per year, behind US and China.

To tackle the problem of rapidly increasing e-waste and its impact on the environment, DEF provides awareness and training through Digital Green Prakriya Community Repair Centre to ensure that the community members can:

- Learn the basics of how to repair the mobile phone, plugs, switches, laptops etc.
- Explore your interest in the e-waste domain and get the needed training and help from our expert.
- Learn about environmental justice and sustainability to prepare for a better tomorrow.
- Discussion and brain storming with fellow participants on how we can improve our daily actions for a sustainable future.
IEC Material Developed
Status Update

Digital, Governance and Educational Services (August and September 2022)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities/Services</th>
<th>Number of Beneficiaries (August)</th>
<th>Number of Beneficiaries (September)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Digital Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>STE(A)M Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>TASK Class</td>
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<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Way Forward

To expand our existing services to the community and mobilize more resources for the efficient utilization and to replicate Digital Excellence Center in all districts of Telangana.

- TASK plans to expand its reach more such centers with Digital Empowerment Foundation, to train the youth on various skills set for employment.

- WE HUB has extended its hand with DEF to further strengthen the capacities of women entrepreneur in the region. The project will work with WEHUB (India’s first state led incubation hub for women entrepreneurs) by the Government of Telangana to promote and develop women entrepreneurship in the State through the public libraries.

- DEF will start more Digital Excellence center with partnership of Public Libraries, Department of School Education, Government of Telangana. Along with existing partners, that DEF will seek to involve and work with for various activities are - IPLM Foundation, The British Council, Tata Trusts, Commonwealth of Learning, UNICEF, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), DELNET, Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD).
Our Partners
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