



PROJECT REPORT

DIGITAL CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR GI INDICATION DESTINATIONS IN TAMIL NADU

SUBMITTED BY - DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT FOUNDATION







Mettupatti Village, a view of the cluster from the street.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Digital Cluster Development Programme (DCDP) for Geographical Indication (GI) Destinations in Tamil Nadu was launched to empower artisan communities by integrating digital tools with traditional craftsmanship. Focused on enhancing digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and market access, the project worked closely with women artisans across three GI clusters to bridge the gap between heritage skills and modern technology. Through training programs, digital resource centers, and social media engagement, artisans gained new avenues to showcase and sell their products, reducing reliance on intermediaries and expanding their customer base. By fostering digital inclusion, the project created opportunities for artisans to embrace innovation while preserving their cultural identity.

Over the past year, the project has transformed the way artisans engage with the digital economy, leading to increased financial independence and visibility for their crafts. Social media platforms became powerful tools for direct-to-consumer sales, while digital payment systems made transactions smoother and more accessible. Beyond economic benefits, the initiative strengthened community networks, encouraged entrepreneurship, and empowered women to take leadership roles in their craft clusters. As the project moves forward, sustaining these efforts through continued digital training, policy support, and expanded collaborations will be essential for long-term impact.



Fathima beevi, artisan from Pattamadai

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Digital Cluster Development Programme (DCDP) for Geographical Indication (GI) Destinations in Tamil Nadu is an initiative aimed at transforming the way Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage is preserved and promoted through digital empowerment. This collaborative project with Standard Chartered Bank focuses on equipping local artisan communities with the tools and knowledge to thrive in the modern digital economy, while simultaneously safeguarding the authenticity and tradition of GI-tagged products.

Tamil Nadu is home to a wealth of GI-tagged products, each of which tells a story of deep-rooted cultural significance, centuries-old craftsmanship, and a unique geographical origin. From the luxurious Kanchipuram silk sarees to the exquisite Chettinad crafts, these products represent the soul of the region, carrying with them centuries of tradition and identity. Recognized under The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, GI-tagged products ensure the protection of these regional treasures, guaranteeing that the unique craftsmanship and the geographical link to the land are preserved.

The Digital Cluster Development Programme focuses on enabling the artisans behind these GI-tagged products to navigate and flourish in the evolving digital landscape. It seeks to bridge the gap between traditional artisanship and modern-day business practices by providing them with the skills to digitally market and sell their products. The programme covers essential aspects like social media marketing, digital business strategies, and e-commerce, ensuring that these

artisans not only protect their heritage but can also expand their reach to broader, global audiences.

Through this initiative, artisans are empowered to share their craft with the world, increasing visibility, improving sales, and ensuring the sustainability of their traditional crafts. The programme goes beyond simple product promotion—it builds the capacity of these artisans, strengthening their economic independence and ensuring that their crafts remain viable in an increasingly digital world.

The partnership with Standard Chartered Bank further strengthens this initiative by integrating financial literacy and management support. The inclusion of financial education helps artisans gain a deeper understanding of managing their businesses effectively, from understanding digital payments to managing online transactions and maintaining profitability. This holistic approach not only elevates the artisans' skills but also encourages the development of their entire community, fostering economic self-sufficiency and digital inclusion in rural regions.

In essence, the Digital Cluster Development Programme for GI Destinations in Tamil Nadu is a forward-thinking approach that blends the preservation of ancient traditions with the opportunities presented by digital innovation. It is an effort to empower artisans with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the digital age, ensuring that Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage continues to thrive for generations to come. Through this project, Tamil Nadu's artisans will not only safeguard their cultural legacy but also embark on a path toward sustainable economic growth and self-reliance in a rapidly changing world.

IMPACT NUMBER WITH LOCATION

Category	Target	Target Achieved	Source of Data
Creation of Three Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs)	3	3	Projectd Database
Entrepreneurship Skill Training for Youth Empowerment	600	637	MIS
Digital Designing Training for Youth Empowerment	60	84	MIS
Capacity Building Workshops for Weavers	800	845	MIS
Apparel / Garment Making	30	65	MIS
Product Finishing and Packaging	30	39	MIS
Handloom Mela	1	1	MIS
Digital Literacy	450	515	MIS
Capacity Building Session on Rural Tourism	10	10	MIS

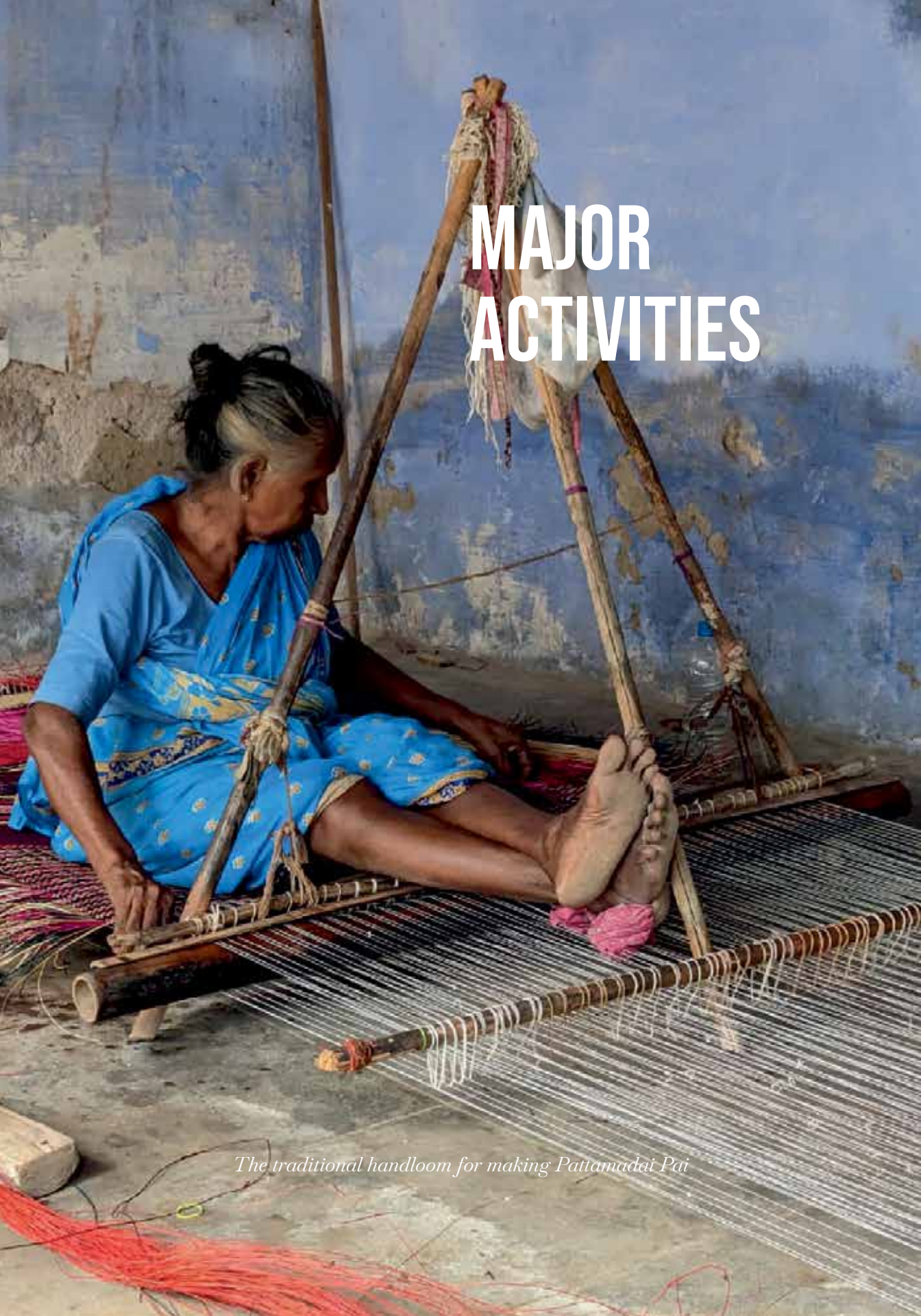
LOCATION WISE IMPACT: COMMUNITIES AND DIGITAL ADOPTION

SALEM			
Activity	Male	Female	Total
Digital Literacy	61	54	153
Digital Design	10	12	22
Entrepreneur Skills	84	123	207
Social Media Workshop	87	144	252
Product Finishing and Packaging	5	9	14
Apparel Making	0	17	17

OOTY			
Activity	Male	Female	Total
Digital Literacy	57	95	152
Digital Design	4	16	20
Entrepreneur Skills	52	148	200
Social Media Workshop	21	228	249
Product Finishing and Packaging	5	10	10
Apparel Making	0	11	11

PATTAMADAI			
Activity	Male	Female	Total
Digital Literacy	26	184	210
Digital Design	10	32	42
Entrepreneur Skills	0	206	206
Social Media Workshop	0	342	342
Product Finishing and Packaging	0	15	15
Apparel Making	0	37	37

MAJOR ACTIVITIES



The traditional handloom for making Pattamadei Pai

The DIGI Project is dedicated to driving digital empowerment and economic growth in rural communities. Through a combination of capacity-building initiatives, digital literacy programs, and entrepreneurial training, the project has made a significant impact on individuals, particularly artisans, youth, and women. Key activities include



Establishment of a “Three GI Cluster Resource Center (CRC): A dedicated hub equipped with computers, essential hardware, software, and training infrastructure to serve as a digital knowledge center for artisans and entrepreneurs, fostering skill development and digital inclusion.



Conducting digital literacy programs: A structured 18-month initiative aimed at enhancing digital skills of 450 youth within the community, ensuring access to online resources, financial services, and opportunities for entrepreneurship.



Training 30 youth as Core Master Digital Designers: Empowering young individuals with specialized design skills to support entrepreneurs and artisans with branding, digital marketing, and product visualization, enabling them to compete in a digital marketplace.



Training and skilling 60 women in digital entrepreneurship: Providing comprehensive training in e-commerce, digital financial literacy, and business management to equip women with the tools to establish and scale their own enterprises.



Conducting 15 workshops on audio media for SOC weavers: Facilitating knowledge-sharing sessions across three districts to develop advocacy materials, enhance storytelling skills, and create digital marketing content that amplifies the reach of traditional weaving communities.



Organizing a Handloom Mela/Festival: A large-scale event that brings together artisans, entrepreneurs, and buyers, providing a platform to showcase traditional crafts, foster collaborations, and celebrate cultural heritage.



Strengthening community-building through training and mentorship in social media: Developing leadership skills among 800 artisans and entrepreneurs by facilitating peer learning, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities to create a self-sustaining support system.



Training 30 artisans in product finishing and packaging: Enhancing artisans' skills in high-quality product finishing, innovative packaging techniques, and market-oriented design, ensuring better product presentation and increased sales potential.



Training 60 digital designers in cataloging and branding: Equipping designers with the ability to create visually appealing digital catalogs and branding strategies that enhance the visibility of traditional products in online and offline markets.



Training 30 women and girls in advanced stitching and apparel ornamentation: Providing hands-on training in intricate stitching techniques, embroidery, and fabric embellishment to enable women to create value-added apparel products for broader market reach.



Providing digital access to 1800 households: Ensuring families benefit from essential digital services, including CSC services, government entitlements, financial inclusion schemes, and digital literacy programs, bridging the digital divide in underserved communities.

RECEE VISITS: IDENTIFYING DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT HUBS

Each digital cluster established in the GI locations serves as a beacon of digital empowerment. These clusters are not just service centers but thriving community spaces designed to bring people together and foster a self-sustaining entity for their development. Our team embarked on an extensive process of identifying suitable locations for these clusters, guided by the principle that they should be embedded within the community.

This approach ensures accessibility, familiarity, and trust, allowing residents to engage with digital opportunities without the burden of traveling long distances.

During the reconnaissance visits, we encountered multiple challenges in

finalizing locations. Gaining the trust of the community was a significant hurdle, as the project was an unfamiliar initiative to them. Securing approval for setting up centers in these areas required persistent engagement, as some locations required government authorization, leading to long waiting periods. In Ooty, particularly in the Nilgiris, the challenge was unique—the tribal communities, especially the Todas, are deeply protective of their cultural heritage and wary of external interventions. Their hamlets are small and dispersed, requiring a culturally sensitive approach to ensure their participation.

To address these challenges, our team conducted continuous field visits to better understand the socio-economic



Recee visit for cluster by Digital Empowerment Foundation team to Ooty visting Toda tribal community.



A team of digital empowerment foundation exploring different options to setup GI centre

landscape of these communities. We organized community meetings to introduce the project, articulate its vision, and emphasize that it was designed for the community's benefit. Identifying potential local leaders who could facilitate the functioning of the centers and mobilize community members proved crucial. We also engaged with multiple stakeholders, including panchayat leaders and local governing bodies, to align efforts and secure their support in building a shared vision.

Through these efforts, we successfully established digital clusters at strategic locations: Mettupatti in Salem, Pattamadai and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, and Tharanadu Mund in Ooty, Nilgiris. These clusters now

serve as critical hubs, fostering digital inclusion, skill development, and entrepreneurship within their respective communities.

INSIGHT- BASELINE ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive baseline study was conducted across the three Geographical Indication (GI) clusters—Salem, Tirunelveli, and Nilgiris—to assess the socio-economic conditions, market access, digital literacy, and infrastructure needs of artisans. The study provided key insights into their livelihood patterns, challenges, and the role of digital empowerment in enhancing their economic prospects. These findings highlight the critical need for targeted interventions to bridge existing gaps and create sustainable economic opportunities for artisans.

MARKET ACCESS & CHALLENGES

- 85% of artisans rely on local sales and traditional middle-men networks.
- Only 12% have access to direct customer interactions through exhibitions or markets.
- 3% of artisans use e-commerce platforms to sell their products.
- 78% are unaware of GI certification benefits in branding and marketing.

DIGITAL & FINANCIAL LITERACY

- Mobile Ownership: 81.1% own a mobile phone, but only 24.6% have a smartphone.
- 15% use their phone for business-related activities.
- Banking Access: 92% have bank accounts, but only 27% use digital payments regularly.



Traditional handloom setup at an artisan household in Salem

- Digital Training Needs: 83% expressed interest in digital skills training, particularly in social media, branding, and e-commerce.
- 59% reported irregular access to raw materials, affecting production timelines.
- 90% expressed the need for better marketing and branding support to expand sales.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGES

- 72% of respondents were initially hesitant about engaging with external organisations.
- In Ooty (Nilgiris), 94% of Toda artisans prefer limited external intervention to preserve their heritage.
- 56% of women in Tirunelveli reported social barriers restricting their ability to work independently.

The study underscores the urgent need for digital interventions to enhance artisan livelihoods. While Toda artisans demonstrate high skill retention, their market access remains limited. Salem and Pattamadai artisans, though engaged in production, require better digital training, financial literacy, and branding support. Addressing these challenges through targeted programs will significantly uplift the GI clusters, ensuring that artisans can sustain and grow their traditional crafts in the modern economy.

INFRASTRUCTURE & RESOURCE NEEDS

- 68% of artisans lack a dedicated workspace or community center.



Salem artisan making silk saree at household handloom setup

LOCATIONS AND CENTER

Following intensive field visits and community interactions, three key artisan clusters were identified as focal points for digital empowerment. Each location is deeply rooted in traditional

craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and unique socio-economic dynamics. By setting up digital clusters within these communities, the initiative aims to bridge the digital divide, enhance market access, and strengthen local livelihoods.



Salem cluster at Mettupatti village

SALEM - METTUPPATTI VILLAGE

Tucked within the bustling city of Salem, Mettupatti village thrives on the art of weaving. Nearly every household here is engaged in crafting the exquisite Salem Silk Sarees, a legacy passed down through generations. The rhythmic clatter of looms fills the air as artisans intricately weave patterns that define the region's identity.

Recognizing the need for digital literacy and market expansion, a digital cluster was established within a weaver's home, ensuring accessibility for the artisans. Through this initiative, weavers are introduced to social media marketing, digital design tools, and e-commerce platforms, empowering them to reach a broader audience.

Additionally, skill enhancement workshops on product finishing, packaging, and branding have been introduced to diversify their market potential and improve income sustainability.

OOTY - THARNADU MUND VILLAGE

High in the Nilgiri Hills, the Toda tribal community has lived in isolation for centuries, safeguarding their cultural heritage and distinct art forms. The Toda people are renowned for Pukhoor, or Toda embroidery, a hand-stitched craft that reflects their intricate motifs and deep spiritual connections with nature.

Establishing a digital center within the Tharanadu Mund village was



Ooty cluster at Tharnadu mund village

initially met with skepticism due to the community's reserved nature and historical reluctance towards external interventions. However, with persistent engagement and the support of the local Panchayat, trust was built, and a dedicated cluster was set up to connect artisans across scattered hamlets.

Here, the focus is on preserving indigenous knowledge while integrating digital skills. Training sessions have been conducted on product diversification, digital documentation, and online selling, enabling Toda artisans to showcase their work beyond their remote landscapes. The initiative also fosters storytelling through digital mediums, allowing them to share their rich cultural narratives with the world.

PATTAMADAI – THE FINE MAT WEAVING LEGACY

In the southern plains of Tamil Nadu, Pattamadai village stands as a testament to the centuries-old art of fine reed mat weaving. The community specializes in crafting the Pattamadai Pai, an intricate handwoven mat made from river reeds,

often gifted during weddings and special occasions. These mats, with their delicate texture and customizable inscriptions, hold immense cultural and economic value.

Recognizing the need for modernizing production processes and expanding market reach, a digital cluster was set up within the community. Here, artisans receive training in branding, product photography, and online retail strategies, enabling them to transition from traditional market dependencies to global digital platforms.



Pattamadai cluster at center of the village, Pattamadai

IDENTIFICATION AND TRAINING OF SOOCHNAPRENEURS

The success of every digital cluster hinges on the presence of a Soochnapreneur, a dedicated individual who serves as a bridge between the community and digital empowerment initiatives. Appointed by the Digital Empowerment Foundation, a Soochnapreneur operates at the grassroots level as a digital changemaker. Their role goes beyond managing the cluster; they are responsible for mobilizing the community, delivering essential digital services, and ensuring that the benefits of training sessions reach every household. With the support of the cluster, they help artisans and entrepreneurs adapt to technology, enhance their skills, and explore new market opportunities.

During field visits, selecting the right Soochnapreneur for each location was just as crucial as identifying the center itself. The ideal candidate is someone with dedication and a willingness to learn, ensuring that even those with minimal formal education can uplift themselves and their communities. They should have strong and trustworthy relationships within the community, with a history of leadership and engagement. The ability to mobilize people and navigate challenges effectively is essential to ensuring that digital interventions reach those who need them the most. Since the project is deeply committed to women's empowerment, the focus was on identifying women Soochnapreneurs who could inspire and uplift other women in their communities, many of whom have limited opportunities for financial independence and skill-building.

After extensive research and interviews, three dynamic women emerged as the Soochnapreneurs for each location: Kaliavani in Salem, Sajiya



Shalini from Digital Empowerment Foundation giving training to Soochnapreneurs and cluster coordinator via MIL kit.



in Ooty, and Fathima in Pattamadai. Each of them embodies resilience, leadership, and transformation. With a deep understanding of their community and a strong drive to bring change, they are poised to lead local digital empowerment efforts.



Toda artisan wearing an traditional toda embroidery shawl, also known as 'pookhul'

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION: STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATION & AWARENESS

The establishment of digital clusters in different locations required more than just setting up physical infrastructure; it necessitated deep-rooted community awareness and engagement. The vision of the DIGI project extends beyond providing digital services—it aims to create a self-sustaining ecosystem where communities can leverage technology for empowerment, growth, and economic independence.

Mobilizing the community was the first and most crucial step. It was essential to ensure that people understood the significance of the project, how it could benefit them, and why active participation was vital. Community mobilization efforts were spearheaded by local resource persons under the project—Soochnapreneurs and Cluster Coordinators—who belonged to the respective villages, making them trusted intermediaries between the project and the community.

HOUSEHOLD OUTREACH & AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

To foster trust and understanding, the ground team conducted extensive door-to-door outreach, visiting households to explain the scope and benefits of digital

intervention. These efforts were tailored to different demographic groups:

Youth Engagement: The younger generation was introduced to digital literacy, skill development opportunities, and new career pathways. They were encouraged to use digital tools for education, job applications, and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Artisan Inclusion: Special attention was given to artisans, particularly those involved in GI-tagged crafts. They were informed about digital marketing, product diversification, and online sales strategies that could expand their market reach.

Women Empowerment: Women were actively encouraged to participate in digital literacy programs, entrepreneurial training, and skill-building workshops to enhance their financial independence.

Elderly & Traditional Workers: Older community members and traditional workers were sensitized to the importance of digital inclusion, ensuring they felt part of the transformation rather than left behind.



Vijaya, cluster coordinator from Ooty mobilising the community members about the DIGI cluster

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Beyond direct community outreach, the mobilization strategy included engaging key stakeholders to ensure broader institutional support:

Panchayat & Local Governance:

Meetings were conducted with Panchayat leaders to align the project with local governance priorities. Their endorsement helped in building trust and participation among villagers.

Cooperative Societies: Organizations like the Handloom Cooperative

Society in Salem were brought on board, extending their support to the project and ensuring artisans had an institutional backing for their digital transition.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs): In Pattamadai and Ooty, various SHGs expressed interest in learning more about digital interventions, paving the way for potential collaborations in financial inclusion and digital business development.



COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS & DEMONSTRATIONS

To make the engagement more interactive, on-ground sessions and demonstrations were conducted at local gathering spaces. Live workshops showcased:

- Digital tools for artisans to promote their products.
- The impact of e-commerce and social media marketing.
- Digital financial literacy, including mobile banking and online transactions.
- Training on how to access government digital schemes and benefits.



Tharnadu Mund panchayat head inaugurating the cluster and activities at Ooty cluster



The kids at Salem cluster learning basics of digital literacy via interactive demos from MIL kit!



V AMEENAL BEEVI: WEAVING TRADITION WITH INNOVATION IN PATTAMADAI

In the heart of Pattamadai, Tamil Nadu, Ameenal Beevi has dedicated her life to the intricate craft of pattamadai pai—a heritage mat weaving tradition passed down for generations. Learning the skill from her mother and aunts, she considers it not just a livelihood but a cultural identity. Each mat, woven from korai grass, is a labor of patience and precision, reflecting years of dedication. Over time, Ameenal expanded her craft beyond mats, introducing handbags, purses, and coasters, blending tradition with modern-day appeal.

While she initially relied on local markets, Ameenal soon realized the potential of digital platforms

to reach a wider audience. Despite initial hesitation, she embraced social media and YouTube, sharing her craft and its rich history through engaging videos. Her online presence not only boosted visibility but also attracted new customers beyond her village, generating appreciation for her work on a broader scale.

Beyond personal success, Ameenal has become an inspiration for other women in Pattamadai. By mentoring young artisans and introducing them to digital selling, she has encouraged them to see their craft as a means of financial independence. She envisions a future where traditional weaving thrives through modern marketing, ensuring that pattamadai pai remains a cherished art form for generations to come. Through her journey, Ameenal proves that heritage and innovation can go hand in hand, weaving a story of resilience, creativity, and cultural pride.

DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINING: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The foundation of digital education lies in equipping individuals, particularly youth, with essential digital literacy skills. In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, having a fundamental understanding of technology is crucial for accessing opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The DIGI centers took a structured approach to digital literacy training, ensuring that young learners from various locations gained hands-on experience with digital tools and applications, ultimately enabling them to participate meaningfully in the digital world.

A Step-by-Step Learning Journey

The digital literacy training at DIGI centers was designed to cater to learners with varying levels of familiarity with technology, starting from the very basics and progressing toward more advanced applications. The training program was divided into multiple phases:

1. Introduction to Digital Devices:

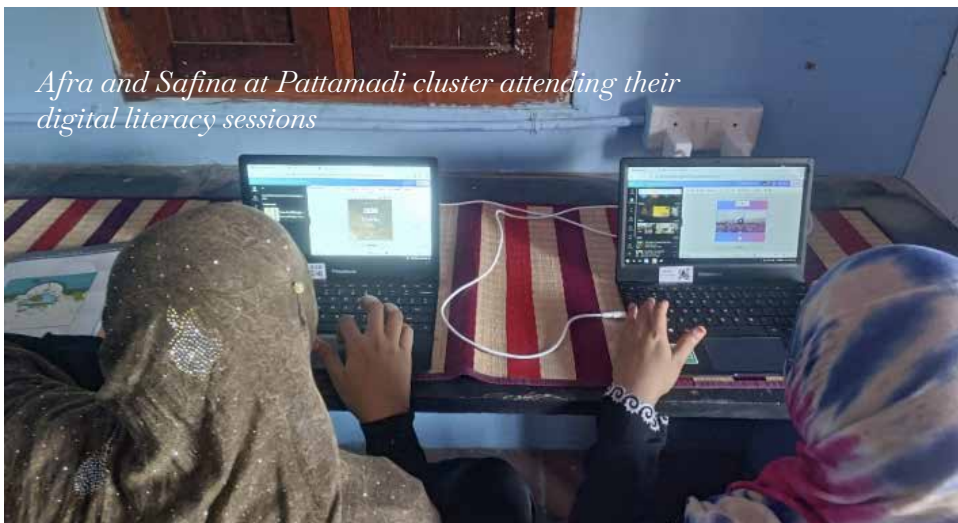
- Understanding the parts and functions of a computer/laptop.
- Learning to operate basic hardware and software.
- Familiarization with mobile phones and tablets as digital tools.

2. Basic Software Training:

- Hands-on practice with Microsoft Office Suite, including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.
- Creating documents, making presentations, and managing spreadsheets for personal and professional use.
- Introduction to Google Workspace for online collaboration.

3. Internet & Online Navigation:

- Basics of internet browsing and search engine usage.
- Understanding safe online practices, cybersecurity, and responsible internet use.
- Navigating websites for educational and job-related purposes.



Afra and Safina at Pattamadi cluster attending their digital literacy sessions



Digital literacy classes at remote locations of Ooty via commuting to respective households.

4. Email & Online Communication:

- Creating and managing email accounts.
- Understanding email etiquette and professional communication.
- Introduction to video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Google Meet for virtual learning and meetings.

5. Interactive & Gamified Learning:

- Engaging learning activities and quizzes to reinforce digital concepts.
- Gamified exercises to make digital literacy training fun and interactive.
- Peer-to-peer learning sessions to boost confidence and collaboration among trainees.



Digital literacy sessions at Salem, conducted by Kaliavani, Sochnapreneur.

PRODUCT PHOTOGRAPHY TRAINING FOR ARTISANS

To enhance the quality of product representation on social media, DIGI introduced a hands-on Product Photography Training for artisans. The objective was to equip them with essential photography skills to improve their digital presence and attract a larger online audience.

Key aspects covered in the training:

- Introduction to professional camera handling and its advantages over smartphone photography.
- Understanding the importance of lighting, focus, and angles to create visually

appealing product images.

- Practical demonstrations on composition techniques to enhance product aesthetics.
- Step-by-step guidance on transferring images from cameras to smartphones, making content easily shareable on social platforms.

This session enabled artisans to develop a new digital skill, improving their ability to showcase products effectively, thus creating a better user experience and expanding their online reach.



Abitha Sin, Toda artisan from Ooty learning and implying photography training to capture Toda products in order to enhance the quality and essence of products uploaded online.

SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure retention and continuous improvement, frequent revision sessions and hands-on practice opportunities were organized. The approach was designed to keep learners engaged, motivated, and confident in using digital tools. Moreover, practical exercises allowed participants to apply their newly acquired skills to real-life scenarios, reinforcing their learning experience.

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOPS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILL TRAINING FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The Entrepreneurship Skill Training program was designed to equip young individuals with essential business knowledge and digital competencies, enabling them to establish their own enterprises or secure employment within their local economies. The training sessions covered a wide range of topics, from business modeling and financial literacy to branding strategies and leveraging social media for marketing.

The program's core objectives included:

- Providing participants with a fundamental understanding of business operations.
- Teaching effective use of digital tools and social media for marketing and outreach.
- Introducing key concepts of business scalability, customer relations, and e-commerce.

Training Components and Key Learning Areas

The program offered a structured curriculum that combined theoretical knowledge with hands-on practical sessions, ensuring that participants could immediately apply their learnings to real-world business scenarios.

1. Entrepreneurial Classes

- Understanding business modeling and strategy development.
- Identifying and tapping into

online market opportunities.

- Learning customer engagement techniques to build brand loyalty.

2. Digital Marketing and Social Media Utilization

- Creating and managing business accounts on platforms like WhatsApp Business and Instagram.
- Developing compelling product descriptions, using high-quality visuals, and engaging with customers to drive sales.
- Understanding digital storytelling and branding to enhance online visibility.

3. Market Dynamics and Business Expansion

- Exploring production, promotion, pricing, and distribution strategies.
- Learning about the role of branding and promotional tools in business growth.
- Utilizing e-commerce platforms for wider market reach and profitability.

Transformational Impact and Achievements

Following the training, participants successfully implemented their learnings, leading to tangible improvements in their business ventures and overall economic independence.

- **Launch of Digital Business Ventures:** Many participants



set up WhatsApp Business and Instagram accounts to showcase and sell their products, significantly expanding their customer base.

- **Empowering Remote Entrepreneurs:** Individuals in rural and remote areas gained access to a broader, more diverse market, overcoming geographical limitations through digital commerce.
- **Enhanced Financial Independence:** The training empowered participants with business acumen and practical skills, allowing them to generate sustainable income streams.

Training Reach and Community Impact

- **Pattamadai, Tirunelveli:** Fathima led training for 224 participants, equipping

them with digital marketing and business formalization skills.

- **Ooty:** Sajiya trained 200 youth, extending the program's impact to even the most remote hamlets.
- **Salem:** Kalaivani provided training to 207 individuals, covering business compliance, scalability, and adaptive strategies for fluctuating market demands.

By the end of the program, many participants had successfully launched their own businesses, offering a diverse range of products such as handmade crafts, digital services, and locally sourced goods. The initiative not only enabled individuals to achieve financial independence but also contributed to the broader economic resilience of their communities.

The Entrepreneurship Skill Training program has laid the groundwork for a

thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas. By integrating digital tools with business education, the program has empowered individuals to embrace self-sufficiency, innovate within their industries, and drive sustainable economic growth. Moving forward, we aim to expand this initiative, providing continued mentorship, advanced training modules, and greater access to digital resources to ensure the long-term success of these budding entrepreneurs.

DIGITAL DESIGNING TRAINING FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Recognizing the growing demand for digital skills, the Core Digital Designing Training program aimed to equip youth with the necessary resources to align with their imagination and creativity.

The sessions covered fundamental and advanced concepts in digital design, typography, color theory, layout structuring, and brand development.

The primary objectives of the training were:

- To provide young individuals with hands-on experience in digital design tools.
- To introduce participants to branding and advertising through digital platforms.
- To enable youth to explore career opportunities in the digital economy through freelance and full-time employment.

Training Modules and Digital Tools

The training was structured to provide an in-depth understanding of digital design tools and their real-world



Pandi Selvi, trainer teaching the youth about digital designing via Canva concepts and tools

applications. A major focus of the program was on Canva, a user-friendly platform that allows individuals to create high-quality visual content with ease.

4. Introduction to Digital Design

- Understanding the principles of design, typography, and color theory.
- Learning how to structure layouts for promotional and branding materials.
- Exploring the role of digital design in marketing and business growth.

5. Canva for Graphic Design

- Hands-on training in using Canva's tools and features for professional design creation.
- Learning how to design banners,

social media posts, and business materials.

- Enhancing visual communication skills to create impactful designs.

6. Branding and Visual Storytelling

- Understanding the importance of branding and its role in business success.
- Learning how to create engaging content that enhances brand identity.
- Exploring visual storytelling techniques to build a compelling narrative for products and services.

IMPACT AND KEY OUTCOMES

The Digital Designing Training had a transformative impact on the participants, enabling them to apply their skills in real-world scenarios.



In Pattamadai, Tirunelveli, Pandi Selvi trained 42 youth, introducing them to practical applications of design in branding, advertising, and business promotion.

In Salem, sessions were conducted for 43 participants, guiding them in creating professional portfolios that could be used to secure freelance and full-time work opportunities.

In Ooty, Pandi Selvi trained 20 youth, focusing on visual storytelling and digital marketing techniques to enhance small business outreach.

This initiative led to the emergence of young entrepreneurs who began offering graphic design services locally, improving the visibility of small businesses and artisans in their communities. Additionally, several participants secured internships and freelance contracts, further bridging the digital divide and creating employment opportunities within the digital economy.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESS GROWTH: TRAINING FOR WEAVERS

The rapid expansion of social media has created unparalleled opportunities for networking, promotion, and skill enhancement. Artisans, who traditionally relied on physical markets and word-of-mouth promotions, are now embracing digital tools to expand their reach. Recognizing the significance of this transformation, our social media training program was designed to equip artisans across various locations with the knowledge and skills required to leverage digital platforms effectively.

The primary objectives of the training were:

- To familiarize artisans with social media as a powerful tool for business growth.
- To introduce young artisans to the potential of digital marketing while also helping experienced artisans transition to online platforms.
- To enable artisans to showcase their products to a global audience, thereby increasing sales and visibility.

Training Modules and Digital Platforms

The training sessions were structured to cover both foundational and advanced aspects of digital marketing. Special emphasis was placed on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube due to their ability to visually showcase craftsmanship and connect with consumers on a personal level.

1. Instagram for Business Growth

- Creating and managing professional accounts.
- Utilizing relevant hashtags, captions, and high-quality images to enhance visibility.
- Understanding Instagram analytics and using insights to improve engagement.

- Leveraging Instagram reels and stories to create viral content that attracts customers.

2. YouTube as a Storytelling Tool

- Producing engaging video content that showcases the art of craftsmanship.
- Using storytelling tech-



niques to create an emotional connection with audiences.

- Demonstrating the step-by-step process of product creation to highlight the authenticity and effort involved.
- 3. E-commerce and Business Expansion**
- Setting up WhatsApp Business for direct customer interaction and seamless transactions.
 - Writing compelling product descriptions that attract potential buyers.
 - Capturing professional product photographs to create a strong brand presence.
 - Utilizing analytics tools to

track customer engagement and sales performance.

As a result of the training, artisans from multiple locations successfully established a digital presence, leading to increased sales and customer engagement. The initiative played a pivotal role in transforming the traditional business models of artisans, making them self-reliant and digitally empowered.

- Artisans Actively Using Social Media for Sales: Orders were received for a variety of products, including Toda keychains, Salem silk sarees, and Pattamadai yoga mats.
- Bulk Orders and Expanded Customer Reach: Many artisans reported receiving large-scale orders from urban and international buyers, significantly increasing

their earnings.

- Reduction in Dependence on Middlemen: Direct customer engagement through social media allowed artisans to retain greater profits and negotiate better prices for their work.

Training Achievements Across Locations

- Pattamadai: Pandi Selvi led training for 342 weavers specializing in Pattamadai Pai products.
- Salem: Selvarani trained 252 weavers working with Salem Silk.
- Ooty: Vinodha facilitated workshops for 204 Toda artisans.

The positive impact of this initiative extended beyond individual artisans. The success stories inspired other community members to adopt digital tools, fostering a culture of digital entrepreneurship in rural areas. By integrating traditional crafts with modern marketing techniques, artisans are now better equipped to sustain and grow their businesses in an increasingly digital world.

The social media training program has proven to be a game-changer for artisans, bridging the gap between tradition and technology. By equipping them with essential digital marketing skills, we have laid the foundation for a self-sustaining ecosystem where craftsmanship can thrive in the modern marketplace. Moving forward, we aim to further refine our training modules, explore additional platforms, and strengthen the digital presence of artisans to ensure their continued success.

APPAREL & GARMENT MAKING TRAINING

Apparel making has been a legacy at all the GI locations, whether it is the art of making Salem sarees or the fine Pattamadai pai. However, with generational changes, product preferences have evolved in terms of quality, design, and utility. To adapt to these shifts without disrupting the art and legacy of GI product-making, we introduced Apparel and Garment Making Training. These sessions provided artisans with resources such as tailoring machines and necessary equipment to conduct tailoring sessions, with a focus on creating new designs beyond traditional motifs.

The primary objectives of the training were:

- To equip artisans with tailoring and garment-making skills while preserving traditional craftsmanship.
- To introduce product diversification to enhance market adaptability.
- To empower women by providing hands-on skills in sewing, pattern-making, and apparel design.

Training Modules and Techniques

1. **Modernizing Traditional Craftsmanship by Product Diversification**
 - Exploring new color combinations and contemporary design patterns.
 - Understanding market trends and consumer preferences.
 - Incorporating traditional fabrics into modern utility

products such as tote bags, laptop covers, and key-chains.

2. Tailoring and Garment Construction

- Hands-on training in sewing, stitching, and embroidery techniques.
- Learning advanced tailoring skills for both contemporary and traditional apparel.
- Developing expertise in finishing techniques to enhance product quality.

3. Entrepreneurial Skills in Apparel Making

- Cost estimation, pricing strategies, and customer management.
- Setting up small-scale tailoring businesses and online apparel stores.
- Creating marketing strategies to promote handcrafted apparel through social media and e-commerce platforms.

IMPACT AND KEY OUTCOMES

- In Salem, Mohana Sundari trained 17 women in advanced sewing techniques and modern garment construction.
- In Ooty, Jeetha Sin worked with 11 women, ensuring they developed competency in apparel making, including creating both contemporary and traditional designs.
- In Pattamadai, Sarswathi trained 36 women in apparel production, guiding them on techniques that aligned with local and national market trends.

The program's impact was profound, as many women began producing customized apparel for local markets and online platforms. Some participants collaborated to form self-help groups, pooling their resources to establish small-scale garment production units. This initiative played a crucial role in enhancing financial independence and social mobility among women, enabling them to contribute more significantly to their households and communities while preserving traditional craftsmanship.





Tailoring workshop at Pattamadai including young girls and experienced artisans from the community



Product diversification by students at the cluster. Bouquet holder via Pattamadaï Pai is a new approach to blend the utility of the traditional product

DIGITAL MARKETING TRAINING FOR ARTISAN EMPOWERMENT

A key component of scaling the income of artisans under the DIGI initiative was the strategic use of digital marketing and social media platforms. By integrating modern marketing techniques, the project aimed to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and the evolving digital marketplace, enabling artisans to expand their reach, attract new customers, and enhance their income streams.

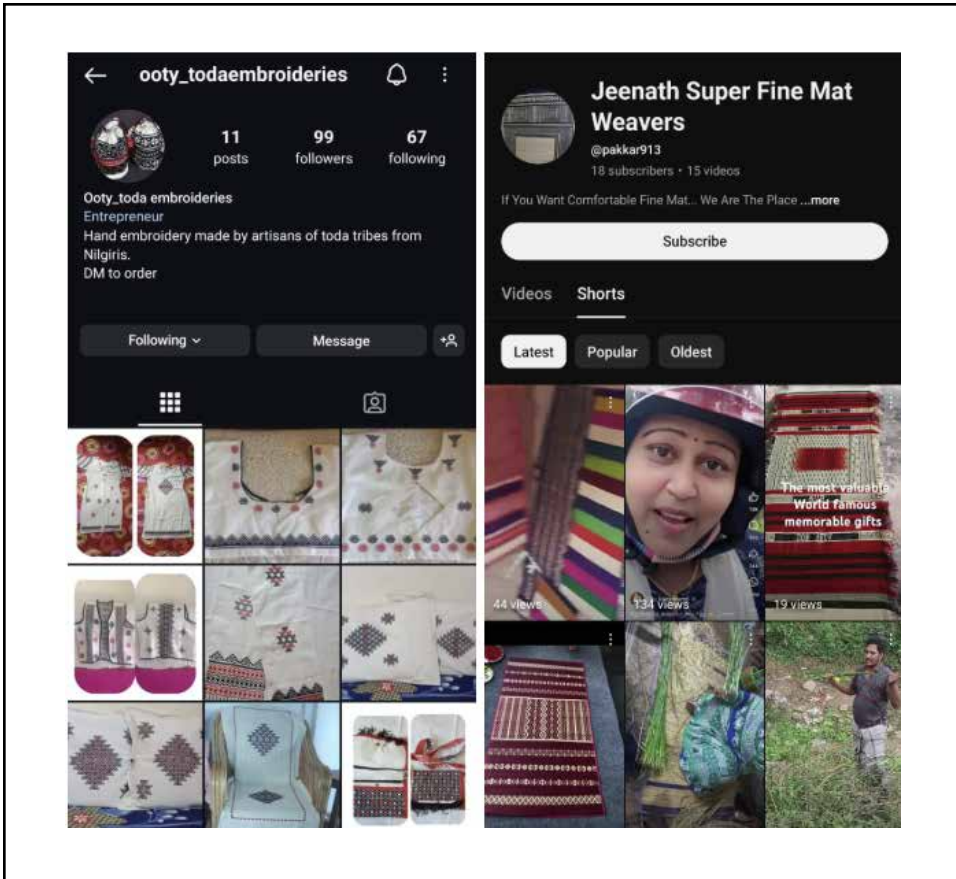
TRAINING & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the project, artisans received structured training on digital

marketing fundamentals, social media engagement, and e-commerce strategies. These sessions focused on:

- Understanding consumer behavior and market trends.
- Learning how to analyze and adapt to changing product demands.
- Exploring techniques for visually appealing product presentation online.
- Mastering photography and content creation to make products more attractive to





(Left): Vinoda Sin, Artisan from Ooty doing online posting and sales of Toda embroidery products via Instagram.

online audiences.

- Developing storytelling skills to connect with customers by sharing the cultural and historical significance of their crafts.

LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESS GROWTH

Artisans were introduced to major social media platforms, including:

- Instagram & Facebook: Used for showcasing handcrafted products, engaging with customers through reels and live sessions, and networking with potential buyers.
- YouTube: Leveraged to create behind-the-scenes content, craft tutorials, and promotional videos, increasing brand visibility.
- WhatsApp Business & E-commerce Platforms: Integrated for direct customer interactions, order management, and payment facilitation.

Hands-on training sessions enabled artisans to create their own social media pages, optimize their profiles, and effectively use hashtags, captions, and stories to attract potential buyers. Special emphasis was placed on understanding algorithms and analytics to maximize reach and engagement.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION & DIGITAL PAYMENTS

To ensure seamless transactions and economic sustainability, artisans were also introduced to:

- Digital payment methods such as Google Pay, Paytm, and UPI for quick and secure transactions.
- Setting up online payment gateways and linking them to their business profiles.
- Understanding pricing strategies and budgeting for sustainable profit margins.

IMPACT & GROWTH

The integration of digital marketing and social media into their business strategies led to a significant transformation in the artisans' economic activities. Many artisans successfully transitioned from local sales to online orders, reaching customers across different regions. The increased visibility of their products helped in expanding their clientele, resulting in a boost in income.

By the end of the project, a noticeable shift had taken place in how artisans perceived digital platforms—not just as tools for entertainment but as powerful avenues for business growth, financial empowerment, and sustainability. This approach not only preserved traditional crafts but also ensured their adaptation in the modern economy, securing a future for artisans in the digital age.

SHOWROOM & POP-UP SPACE: A CORNER FOR CULTURE, COMMERCE, AND COMMUNITY

The Showroom & Pop-Up Space within the DIGI cluster is a unique initiative that bridges tradition and digital empowerment, providing artisans with a dedicated platform to showcase and market their products. Designed as a museum-cum-marketplace, this space serves as an experiential center where traditional craftsmanship meets modern market strategies.

A Hub for Artisan Empowerment

Recognizing the need for better market access, the showroom was created to display GI-tagged heritage products, alongside diversified creations developed through DIGI's training sessions. The artisans, particularly women and young entrepreneurs, have actively curated, managed, and utilized this space, turning it into a thriving hub of creativity and commerce. This initiative also introduced artisans to product photography and digital marketing. With the guidance of DIGI's training programs, artisans learned to capture high-quality images of their work, enabling them to improve their online presence and attract a global audience.

A Marketplace Rooted in Community

Beyond being an exhibition space, the showroom has transformed into a micro-marketplace, allowing artisans to generate additional income through direct sales to visitors. Tourists, local buyers, and digital consumers now have the opportunity to purchase handcrafted items directly from the artisans, fostering economic resilience within the community.

Moreover, this space has strengthened artisans' understanding of customer preferences, pricing, and branding,

turning them into market-savvy entrepreneurs. Visitors not only buy products but also engage in interactive storytelling sessions,

where artisans share the history and significance of their crafts, making the experience immersive and enriching.

Fostering Innovation & Heritage Preservation

The Showroom & Pop-Up Space is more than a market—it's a cultural beacon, ensuring that age-old weaving, embroidery, and craft traditions remain relevant in the digital age. The space is evolving into a community-driven retail model, where artisans, weavers, and local entrepreneurs collaborate, innovate, and sustain their livelihoods.

*Pop-up space at Tharnadu Mund, Ooty cluster,
exhibiting Toda embroidery diversified products as
jackets, keychains, purses, etc.*



SHOWCASING GI HERITAGE: RURAL TOURISM, EXHIBITIONS, AND MARKET LINKAGES

RURAL DIP: PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM IN SALEM'S GI CLUSTER

As part to promote rural tourism in the GI Cluster of Salem, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) organized the Rural Digital Intervention Program (Rural DIP) to highlight the transformative impact of digital technology in the region

To showcase this initiative on a global scale, we invited delegates from Brazil, including representatives from Dataprev and the Brazilian Government, to experience firsthand how technology is being integrated into grassroots communities. This visit provided a unique opportunity for the delegates to witness how digital tools are combating chronic poverty and economic challenges while simultaneously preserving the rich cultural heritage of the region.

During their visit, the Brazilian delegates engaged with the community of artisans renowned for their handloom creations, which have earned a prestigious GI tag for Salem Fabric. They immersed themselves in the artisans' daily lives, gaining an in-depth understanding of their culture and the intricate weaving techniques involved in crafting these exquisite fabrics.

The delegates observed how digital literacy and connectivity are empowering artisans by enabling them to market their products more effectively, expand their reach, and access broader markets. By integrating digital tools into their business practices, these artisans are not only enhancing their craftsmanship but also ensuring the sustainability of their traditional livelihoods. This initiative

serves as a prime example of how rural tourism can be leveraged to showcase the intersection of tradition and technology. By promoting the unique cultural and artisanal heritage of the GI Cluster of Salem, we are fostering a deeper appreciation for these crafts while driving economic development in the region.

One of the most impactful aspects of the visit was the direct economic boost artisans received through product sales. The Brazilian delegates showed immense appreciation for the craftsmanship and purchased a significant number of handmade products. This not only provided immediate financial gains to the artisans but also strengthened their confidence in leveraging digital platforms for future sales. The increase in demand and visibility resulting from this engagement underscored the potential of rural tourism in driving both cultural appreciation and economic growth.



Brazil delegates visit to Salem cluster i.e Mettupatti village. Visited artisan household, witnessing the art of Salem silk products along with Digital Empowerment Foundation team the DIGI project intervention.

A CELEBRATION OF GI ARTISANS: PONDICHERRY EXHIBITION

On September 15th, 2024, the Digital Museum Society, in collaboration with the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), hosted an inspiring event in Pondicherry. This exhibition, a key feature of DEF's broader digital advocacy showcase, beautifully blended digital innovation with traditional craftsmanship, emphasizing the role of technology in safeguarding and promoting heritage.

The event brought together artisans from three renowned GI-tagged crafts: Salem silk weavers, Pattamadai mat makers, and Toda embroiderers from the Nilgiris. Many of these artisans, who had never before exhibited beyond their local communities, were given a prestigious platform to present their work to a wider audience. The exhibition space was designed to encourage direct engagement, allowing visitors to interact with the artisans, learn about their intricate craft techniques, and understand the cultural significance of their work.

This immersive experience fostered a deep appreciation for the artisans' skill and dedication and financial gains for their work. Visitors were not only captivated by the exquisite craftsmanship but also gained insight into the challenges artisans face in preserving their heritage amid modernization. The personal exchanges between artisans and attendees led to a newfound respect for handmade traditions, with many visitors making immediate purchases, resulting in significant sales and direct economic benefits for the artisans.

A central focus of the exhibition was the role of digital empowerment in sustaining traditional crafts. DEF representatives conducted live demonstrations on leveraging

digital tools, introducing artisans to e-commerce platforms and social media marketing strategies. Many artisans, some of whom had minimal digital exposure, were introduced to new possibilities for expanding their reach and connecting with broader markets.

Additionally, the event served as an educational platform for visitors, shedding light on the GI tagging system and its significance in safeguarding traditional art forms. Informative displays and discussions highlighted how purchasing GI-tagged products directly supports artisans and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage.



MARKETING FOUNDATION WORKSHOP, 11-13TH NOVEMBER 2024, PATTAMADAI

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in partnership with Crafts Council of India (CCI) the Marketing Foundation Workshop aimed to empower Pattamadai artisans with essential marketing and digital skills. The workshop sought to bridge the gap between traditional craftsmanship and modern marketplaces, equipping artisans with the knowledge and tools to enhance the value, visibility, and sustainability of their craft.

The workshop provided a comprehensive foundation in marketing and digital skills tailored to the needs of Pattamadai artisans. By deepening their understanding of market structures, artisans learned how to position their products strategically, differentiate between various markets, and enhance the value of their craft. Sessions on branding, packaging, pricing, and promotion empowered them to make informed decisions about their products and explore new sales channels.

The introduction of the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action) model helped artisans understand customer behavior, enabling them to craft more compelling narratives around their work. Additionally, the hands-on experience with e-commerce platforms and social media marketing equipped them with digital tools essential for business growth. Artisans also developed practical skills in product photography, catalog creation, and content writing, ensuring they could effectively

communicate their craft's uniqueness to potential buyers. Artisans learned the difference between selling and marketing, focusing on the six key Ps—Product, Packaging, Price, Positioning, Promotion, and Place.

Ultimately, the workshop bridged the gap between traditional craftsmanship and modern digital markets, fostering economic independence and long-term sustainability for the artisans. This initiative played a crucial role in preparing Pattamadai artisans to navigate contemporary markets while preserving their traditional craftsmanship.

LET'S GI MELA: BRIDGING TRADITION AND MODERN MARKETS

On October 9, 2024, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in collaboration with Futuremakers by Standard Chartered Bank, organized the Let's GI Mela at the Standard Chartered Bank Campus in Chennai. This event was part of the ongoing Digital Cluster Development Programme for Geographical Indication (GI) destinations. The Mela aimed to highlight the importance of GI-tagged products and connect artisans directly with modern consumers, promoting digital inclusion and artisanal craftsmanship.

The event featured three principal stalls representing Salem silk, Pattamadai Pai, and Toda embroidery. Visitors engaged with artisans showcasing exquisite handcrafted silk sarees, veshtis, and dupattas from Salem; finely woven Pattamadai Pai mats and accessories from Tirunelveli; and intricate Toda embroidery shawls and handcrafted souvenirs from the Nilgiris. Additionally, the DIGI-TEA stall offered local delicacies such as Ooty's spices, coffee, and chocolates, along with the famous Tirunelveli halwa. This initiative also fostered entrepreneurship among rural women, enabling them to explore new income opportunities beyond their traditional crafts.

For many artisans, this was their first experience exhibiting their work outside their villages, offering them direct interactions with customers without middlemen. Artisans like Ramzan Beevi from Pattamadai shared how this opportunity was life-changing, allowing her to gain recognition and receive immediate feedback on her craft. The event also emphasized digital empowerment, with artisans receiving training in social media marketing,

cataloguing, and branding. Many artisans, such as Kaviya from Ooty and Fathima from Pattamadai, have since expanded their digital presence and secured online sales through platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

The Let's GI Mela successfully showcased the tangible impact of digital inclusion, providing artisans with financial and emotional encouragement while educating consumers on the significance of preserving cultural heritage through GI-tagged products.





Salem silk products at the Mela by Selvarani and other artisans. The products varied from silk dupattas, handbags, etc



Toda artisans at Let's GI Mela showcasing customer Toda embroidery products.

DIGI-TEA: EMPOWERING TODA WOMEN THROUGH DIGITAL INCLUSION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



In the serene hills of Ooty, Aswini Sin (22) and Abitha Sin (23) grew up surrounded by the traditions of the Toda tribe—its rich embroidery and the steady flow of tourists. Yet, they longed to carve their own path, beyond the crafts and customs of their village. College introduced them to new possibilities, sparking a dream of building something of their own.

Their journey took shape when the DIGI Center opened in their village, offering access to digital tools and entrepreneurial guidance. Inspired by videos showcasing small businesses, they envisioned a venture that blended their culture with innovation. With support from the DIGI team, they launched DIGI-TEA, a small tea stall near the center, strategically placed to attract tourists. The team guided them through setting up digital payment systems, bank accounts, and QR codes, enabling them to accept cashless transactions—an unfamiliar concept in their community.

Determined to grow, Aswini and Abitha used skills from DIGI’s social media workshops to expand their reach. They are now preparing to launch an Instagram page, sharing their journey and promoting their stall to a wider audience. Their turning point came when they participated in an exhibition in Chennai, selling local spices, coffee, and chocolates. This first-time exposure outside their village boosted their confidence and broadened their vision, igniting a desire to scale their venture even further.

Today, DIGI-TEA is more than just a tea stall—it’s a symbol of empowerment. Aswini and Abitha’s success is inspiring other young Toda women, proving that with the right tools and support, new opportunities can emerge in the most unexpected places. Their journey reflects the power of digital inclusion and entrepreneurship, paving the way for a future where tradition and modernity coexist, driven by ambition and innovation.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT & KEY MILESTONES

The DIGI Project aimed to digitally empower artisans across three Geographical Indication (GI) clusters—Ooty, Salem, and Pattamadai—by providing them with digital literacy, entrepreneurship skills, and access to online markets. This initiative focused on reducing the digital divide, enhancing financial inclusion, and integrating traditional crafts into the digital economy. The following sections highlight the key impact areas, challenges, and recommendations drawn from the Endline Impact Assessment Report.

1. DIGITAL LITERACY & ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING

- To strengthen artisans' ability to navigate the digital economy, the project implemented comprehensive digital literacy and entrepreneurship training. The program:
- Provided hands-on digital literacy training to artisans, enabling them to use smartphones, social media, and e-commerce platforms effectively.
- Equipped youth with entrepreneurship skills, including branding, pricing, and financial literacy.
- Trained artisans in social media marketing and digital business tools to increase product visibility.
- Focused on designing, cataloging, and branding to enhance digital presence.
- Organized a GI Mela/Festival to promote and market GI-tagged products.

2. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE & CLUSTER RESOURCE CENTERS (CRCs)

- To facilitate digital adoption and learning, three Digital Cluster Resource Centers (CRCs) were established in:
- Salem, Ooty, and Pattamadai, equipped with:
- Digital Training Centers with computers and projectors for literacy sessions.
- Weaver/Artisan Training Centers for product development and employability enhancement.
- Digital Studios for product photography and social media content creation.

- Showrooms & Museums to exhibit and sell GI-tagged crafts.
- Common Service Centers for Aadhar, digital banking, and financial services.
- These centers served as digital knowledge hubs, significantly reducing travel barriers and enabling artisans to engage in online business activities.

3. DIGITAL ACCESS & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Social media training sessions increased youth engagement in digital marketing.
- Elderly women participated, some producing typed documents for the first time.
- Smartphone literacy training introduced artisans to email, social media, and online transactions.
- Product designing and finishing training improved marketability and product quality.
- The focus on bridging generational and gender gaps in digital adoption ensured inclusive participation across all age groups.

4. FINANCIAL INCLUSION & DIGITAL PAYMENTS

- Tirunelveli led in digital literacy adoption, followed by Salem and Nilgiris.
- Nilgiris artisans were the most active users of digital payments, while Salem and Tirunelveli had lower adoption rates.
- Older artisans faced difficulties with digital payments, highlighting the need for continued targeted training.
- By integrating financial literacy into digital training, the project enabled artisans to access secure digital payment systems and reduce cash dependency.

5. WOMEN-LED TRAINING & SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Women-led initiatives ensured gender-inclusive training programs.
- Women Sochnapreneurs acted as digital trainers, fostering local mentorship and empowerment.
- Toda women in Ooty preserved generational embroidery traditions while integrating digital tools.
- Muslim women in Pattamadai adapted to digital marketing, overcoming socio-economic restrictions.
- Women artisans trained in sewing, garment-making, and financial

management, improving their economic independence.

- Challenges such as financial constraints for raw materials and time limitations due to household responsibilities remained significant barriers, requiring further interventions.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA & MARKET LINKAGES

- Instagram and Facebook onboarding allowed artisans to sell directly to customers.
- Daily social media postings improved engagement and brand recognition.
- Artisans in Ooty learned to manage online orders via email and WhatsApp Business.
- Tourism and e-commerce integration opened new market opportunities.
- The success of social media-based marketing strategies demonstrated the potential for artisans to bypass middlemen and connect directly with customers, ensuring better profit margins.

7. GI PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION & CRAFT PROMOTION

- Toda embroidery artisans introduced modern product variations like tote bags and scarves.
- Salem textile weavers and Pattamadai mat artisans adapted to changing consumer demands.
- Despite the GI tag, weavers in Salem faced pricing and market competition challenges.
- Limited branding and marketing knowledge hindered visibility and sales growth.
- This underscores the need for sustained branding, storytelling, and global outreach efforts to enhance the commercial viability of GI products.

8. TOURISM & RURAL ECONOMY GROWTH

- Airbnb homestay programs in Salem promoted local crafts and increased tourist inflow.
- Community members in Ooty engaged visitors by explaining their craft techniques.
- Tourism integration created new revenue streams for artisans.
- Global partnerships, such as with Brazilian delegates, positioned GI crafts on an international platform.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY AHEAD

While the DIGI Project successfully introduced artisans to digital tools, e-commerce, and entrepreneurship, several challenges continue to hinder their ability to scale their businesses and achieve long-term financial sustainability. One of the most pressing issues is financial constraints, particularly the high cost of raw materials, which limits artisans' ability to produce in larger quantities and meet growing demand. Additionally, limited awareness of government welfare schemes prevents many artisans from accessing financial aid and benefits that could provide much-needed economic relief. This lack of knowledge keeps them dependent on informal credit sources, often at high-interest rates, further restricting business growth.

Another significant challenge is the continued reliance on intermediaries, which reduces artisans' profit margins despite their ability to engage in direct-to-consumer sales through digital platforms. While social media and e-commerce have opened new revenue streams, many artisans still lack the confidence or resources to fully manage these platforms independently. Young artisans opting for non-craft jobs further threaten the continuity of traditional skills, as weaving, embroidery, and handmade crafts are increasingly seen as less lucrative career paths compared to modern employment opportunities. Additionally, handloom workers in Salem face stiff competition from machine-made textiles, which are mass-produced at lower costs, making it difficult for handmade products to compete in mainstream markets.



To address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, combining financial support, cooperative-led digital initiatives, and policy-level interventions. The digitization of cooperative societies can help streamline artisan sales and ensure a more transparent and equitable supply chain. Expanding government outreach programs will be critical in increasing artisans' access to financial aid, training programs, and subsidies. A national-level GI cluster integration could provide a unified platform where artisans from different regions can collectively market their products, creating a stronger and more competitive presence in both domestic and international markets.



Despite these challenges, the DIGI Project has demonstrated the transformative power of digital literacy and entrepreneurship training. The integration of women-led training programs has strengthened community networks and financial independence, paving the way for more inclusive growth. Social media and e-commerce have already expanded market reach, but sustained efforts are required to ensure scalability and long-term viability. More time and continuous intervention will be essential to achieving deep-rooted change, as digital adoption and market adaptation require sustained support beyond initial training programs.

Looking ahead, strengthening cooperative networks, expanding government support, and fostering global collaborations will be crucial in ensuring the long-term sustainability of digital empowerment for artisans. By addressing existing challenges with innovative policy solutions and targeted interventions, the project can help artisans build more resilient, self-sufficient businesses, ensuring that traditional crafts not only survive but thrive in the modern digital economy.

Legal protections against counterfeit GI products must also be strengthened to safeguard the authenticity and economic value of traditional crafts. Additionally, enhancing collaboration with design institutes can help artisans innovate and modernize their products while retaining their cultural essence.





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AND SAI PRASAD
EVERY HAPPINESS

