





A woman wearing a red and white headscarf and a white floral-patterned sari is looking down at a smartphone in her hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a path.

# DEFending the Margins

Access to Rights &  
Rights to Access

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# DEFending the Margins: Access to Rights & Rights to Access

In the past year, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) has expanded its initiatives to strengthen connectivity, enhance digital literacy, and foster digital inclusion across India. With a steadfast commitment to access to rights and rights to access, DEF has pioneered solutions that address digital inequalities, ensuring that marginalised communities can leverage technology for socio-economic empowerment. Through a multi-pronged approach encompassing infrastructure development, capacity building, advocacy, and entrepreneurship, DEF continues to bridge the digital divide in meaningful and sustainable ways.

Recognising that connectivity is a fundamental enabler of digital inclusion, DEF has continued its efforts in establishing Digital Centres across remote and underserved regions. As of early 2025, over 2,300 CIRC's have been set up across 250+ districts in 28 states of India, providing public access to digital

tools, internet services, and digital literacy training. These centres serve as crucial access points where community members can learn to navigate digital platforms, access government services, and participate in the digital economy.

The Wireless for Communities initiative has further expanded internet access in areas with limited or no connectivity, particularly benefiting tribal, minority, and economically disadvantaged groups. By deploying low-cost wireless networks and community-driven digital solutions, DEF has ensured that access to information and digital resources is not a privilege but a right for all.

Digital access is incomplete without economic empowerment. The SoचनाPreneur Program has continued to strengthen its network of digital entrepreneurs who facilitate digital access and awareness at the last mile. These local changemakers help rural communities navigate



online services, apply for government schemes, and build digital literacy, ensuring that technology becomes an enabler of rights and opportunities rather than a barrier.

DEF has remained a strong advocate for inclusive digital policies and responsible technology use. Over the past year, the foundation has engaged with policymakers, civil society organisations, and technology companies to push for greater digital accessibility, particularly for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). By advocating for inclusive design and accessible digital services, DEF has contributed to shaping a digital landscape that accommodates all users, regardless of physical or cognitive abilities.

The foundation has also expanded its focus on responsible and meaningful use of the internet and digital rights, hosting discussions and workshops on ethical AI, misinformation, and data privacy. These initiatives aim to ensure that the rapid digitisation of India does not come at the cost of individual rights and community well-being.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to connecting the unconnected, ensuring equitable access, and building a future where technology drives social and economic change. With every connection established and every skill imparted, DEF continues to stand firmly in defence of the margins.



## Message from Founder-Director

In an increasingly digital world, the gap between the connected and the unconnected continues to widen. While technology holds immense potential to transform lives, for millions on the margins, access remains a distant reality. At Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), we firmly believe that digital inclusion is not a privilege – it is a right. Our mission is clear: to ensure that every individual, regardless of geography or circumstance, can harness the power of digital for social and economic empowerment.

Through our efforts, we have gone beyond facilitating connectivity – we have enabled marginalised communities to access their rights and exercise their right to access. By equipping individuals with essential digital skills, promoting digital literacy, and fostering local leadership, we have empowered them to actively participate in the digital economy. Our initiatives have paved pathways for inclusive growth, offering opportunities to learn, earn, and lead.

Yet, the challenges remain. The digital divide persists, and so does our determination. We are unwavering in our commitment to building a fair and inclusive digital landscape where no one is left behind. Every connection we establish, every skill we impart, and every voice we amplify brings us closer to a future of equitable progress.

As we move forward, I invite you to stand with us in this journey of empowerment. Together, let us continue to defend the margins and build a world where technology truly serves everyone.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Osama Manzar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Osama Manzar  
Founder-Director



# Impact so far..

Expanded to **28 states** and more than **250 districts**

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**35 million** digitally empowered

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**20 million** women digitally enabled

---

**1.5 million** community members have been connected with entitlements

---

**3000 centres** were established

---

**2 Lacs artisans** have been empowered through digital inclusion programs

---

**20 million** youth digitally empowered

---

# What We Achieved This Year

**2 million** digitally empowered

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**1.4 million** women digitally enabled

---

**80,000** community members have been connected with entitlements

---

**400 new centres** were established

---

**2 Lacs artisans** have been empowered through digital inclusion programs

---

**50,000** trained in digital creation & dissemination

---

**5 major events** have been organised

---

**1.5 million** youth digitally empowered

---

**3. 50,000** trained in STEAM education

---

**10 books** were published

---

# Governing Board



Osama Manzar



Shaifali Chikermane



Natasha  
Badhwar



Amitabh  
Singhal



Shalini  
Kala



Madanmohan  
Rao



Sharada  
Kerkar



Shobitha  
Kedlaya

# Advisory Board



Mathew  
Cherian



Dr. Ganesh  
Natarajan



Manisha  
Aryal



Anriette  
Esterhuysen



Johnathan  
Bill



Dr. Akhtar  
Badshah



Asha S.  
Kanwar



Sonia N.  
Jorge



Dr. Rajiv Kumar



Arun Maira



Rajnesh Singh



# DEF's Flagship Programs and Projects







SoochnaPreneur



# SoochnaPreneur சமூக தகவல் வள மையம்



# SoochnaPreneur: Empowering Rural Communities through Digital Entrepreneurship

The SoochnaPreneur program is a pioneering initiative by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) that addresses one of India's most pressing challenges—the digital and information divide in rural areas. Launched in 2016, the program transforms local individuals into digital entrepreneurs, equipping them with tools and training to provide last-mile access to critical government services, welfare schemes, and essential digital resources. By leveraging technology to bridge the gap between communities and their entitlements, SoochnaPreneurs serve as catalysts for digital empowerment.

The need for this program stems from the widespread lack of digital literacy, unreliable connectivity, and bureaucratic hurdles that prevent rural populations from accessing their rights. Without proper digital infrastructure and awareness, millions remain excluded from crucial government benefits, educational opportunities, and financial services. DEF recognised this challenge and developed SoochnaPreneur as a sustainable model for community-driven digital empowerment.

Through a network spanning 28 states and over 250 districts, SoochnaPreneurs have connected 35 million people to essential digital services. The program has also established 3,000 Digital Resource Centres at the panchayat level, ensuring that communities have access to digital tools and assistance.

In addition, it fosters inclusivity by empowering Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) as digital entrepreneurs.

The global recognition of SoochnaPreneur, including the Global Tech Challenge 2020 by the World Bank, highlights its success in bridging the digital divide. By promoting rural digital entrepreneurship, the program not only enhances digital literacy and connectivity but also fosters economic resilience, ensuring that access to information becomes a right rather than a privilege.

2,000 rural entrepreneurs  
empowered through technology

---

1.5 million people connected  
to government schemes and  
digital services

---

3,000 digital resource centres  
providing last-mile access

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Resource Mobilization  
Through Bricolage in  
Social Enterprises by  
Aindrila Chatterjee



Video Stories



# Going Online As Leaders

## (GOAL): Bridging the Digital Gender Divide Through Mentorship

The Going Online As Leaders (GOAL) program is a mentoring initiative by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) designed to bridge the digital gender divide and empower young women in rural and tribal communities. By pairing them with inspirational mentors from diverse backgrounds, GOAL fosters digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills, enabling women to navigate the digital world with confidence.

Despite the rapid expansion of India's digital ecosystem, women in rural and tribal areas face significant barriers to access, including lack of digital infrastructure, limited educational resources, and socio-cultural restrictions. GOAL addresses these challenges by providing structured mentorship, digital training, and networking opportunities that equip young women with essential digital skills.

Following its success in 2019, GOAL was adopted and expanded by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, significantly increasing its outreach. In its latest edition, the program established global mentorship connections, pairing 15 young women from Telangana, Jharkhand, and Bihar with mentors from the United States. These sessions covered critical topics such as data privacy, governance, and digital education, offering participants a broader perspective on the digital world.

GOAL has empowered many women to become digital entrepreneurs, breaking gender barriers and fostering economic independence. By leveraging mentorship and digital education, DEF ensures that women in marginalised communities gain the knowledge and confidence to participate in and contribute to India's digital economy.

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17,000+ women mentored  
across 24 states and 135  
districts.

---

15 girls from tribal and  
marginalised communities  
connected with 6 mentors  
from the United States for  
global mentorship and digital  
exposure.

Scan to view the  
latest film



Scan to read coffee  
table book





Adopted by  
Ministry of  
Tribal Affairs

# Samarth SoochnaPreneur

India is home to a diverse population exceeding 1.4 billion people, with an estimated 90 million individuals living with some form of disability. Despite various efforts by the Indian government to promote inclusion through policies and welfare schemes, persons with disabilities (PwDs) continue to face significant challenges—including low literacy rates, limited employment opportunities, and pervasive social stigma. As a result, PwDs remain among the most marginalised and excluded segments of Indian society.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the transformative potential of digital technologies to promote inclusive development and improve the lives of PwDs. By harnessing digital tools and platforms, PwDs can gain access to essential information and services, acquire new skills, and explore opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Digital Empowerment Foundation's flagship program, Samarth SoochnaPreneur, emerges as a pioneering initiative that empowers PwDs in underserved regions across 20 states in India. The program provides sustainable entrepreneurial opportunities for persons

with disabilities and facilitates community-wide access to rights and entitlements.

Through this initiative, DEF identifies individuals with physical disabilities and enables them to become digitally empowered, village-level entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs not only earn a livelihood for themselves but also deliver vital services within their communities. They receive training in functional digital literacy and are equipped with essential tools such as a tablet, phone, desktop, printer, and scanner.

Once trained and equipped, they offer a wide range of digital services—such as digital literacy training, e-ticketing, scanning and printing services, information on public schemes and entitlements, and assistance with submitting applications for government programs.

This initiative provides PwDs with the opportunity to pursue an independent and dignified profession. It enables them to support their families while contributing meaningfully to society—instilling a sense of respect, confidence, and value in their lives.

# Hope 50

The Hope 50 project aims to train 50 Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) as Samarth Sochnapreneurs (SSPs) in Hyderabad and nearby districts—Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Bhuvanagiri Yadadri, and Medchal. These individuals will receive training in digital literacy, financial literacy, entitlement services, and entrepreneurship to build sustainable livelihoods.

Through local SSP Centres, they will offer digital services, train community members, and connect them to government schemes—promoting financial independence and inclusion. The centres are expected to be fully operational and income-generating within the first year.



DISABILITY SCHEME

**Serve&Earn**  
250/33

In partnership with the Government of Telangana and the Equally Able Foundation, the "Serve & Earn 250/33" Disability Scheme is launched at the village level to digitally empower 100,000 unconnected villagers annually across 5,000 villages in the state, through 250 Micro/Nano Digital Entrepreneurs.

The program aims to create an inclusive society for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) by facilitating equal opportunities and providing an enabling environment for them to lead productive, self-sustaining, and dignified lives in an increasingly digital world.

# Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs): Bridging the Digital Divide in Rural India



Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) are unique, community-driven hubs established by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) to foster digital literacy and equitable growth across India. These centers provide services such as digital training, access to information, and business development support, transforming underserved communities into information-rich societies.

Despite India's rapid digital advancement, a significant digital divide persists, particularly in rural areas. As of January 2025, India had approximately 806 million internet users, representing a 55.3% penetration rate. However, this indicates that around 652 million

individuals remained offline, with rural regions disproportionately affected. In 2023, rural India accounted for 442 million active internet users, surpassing urban areas, yet many communities still lack adequate digital infrastructure and literacy.

To address these challenges, DEF has established over 3,000 CIRCs across more than 250 districts in 28 states and union territories since 2007. These centers, managed by local community members, are equipped with computers, internet access, and other digital tools. They offer training in ICT skills, e-governance services, and entrepreneurship opportunities, empowering individuals to enhance

their livelihoods and participate in the digital economy.

By providing accessible digital resources and education, CIRC's play a crucial role in bridging the digital divide, ensuring that marginalized communities are not left behind in India's digital transformation.

35 million lives impacted across rural and semi-urban regions.

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20 million women are empowered through digital literacy and information access.

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1.5 million individuals provided digital financial literacy, digital skilling, and access to entitlements.

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600 differently-abled entrepreneurs supported, promoting inclusive digital participation.

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1 million Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) provided with digital access to employment opportunities.

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Watch our success stories from the ground



## Zooming Through Dreams!

Beena Joshi, a 15-year-old student, has always been fascinated by cameras and capturing emotions through photography. Despite her father working as a driver and her mother as a waitress at a local restaurant, Beena's passion for photography remained strong.

### Zooming Through Dreams!

Through the Digital Literacy Program at the Community Information Resource Centre in Vasant Kunj, she gained hands-on experience in photography, videography, and Adobe Photoshop.

Now equipped with these skills, Beena dreams of owning a camera and pursuing street photography, aspiring to become a cinematographer and capture the world through her lens.

## Digital Didi: Breaking Menstrual Stigma Through Awareness and Empowerment

In rural India, menstruation remains shrouded in myths and misinformation, restricting women's mobility, education, and economic opportunities. Many girls learn about menstruation only at puberty, leading to social stigma and poor menstrual hygiene management. Without access to accurate information and sustainable products, millions rely on unhygienic materials, increasing health risks.

The Digital Didi program by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is an initiative that combines menstrual health awareness with digital and economic empowerment. At its core is the SmartPad, an eco-friendly, reusable sanitary pad embedded with a QR code. When scanned, the code grants users access to a 100-hour digital literacy course, enabling them to learn essential digital skills at their own pace, without mobility constraints. This innovative approach ensures that menstrual health education is linked to digital inclusion, breaking both societal and technological barriers.

Beyond awareness, Digital Didi fosters entrepreneurship by training women to manufacture and sell SmartPads within their communities. This not only promotes menstrual hygiene but also creates a sustainable, women-led microbusiness ecosystem. By

equipping women with knowledge, resources, and digital skills, Digital Didi transforms menstruation from a taboo into an opportunity for health, empowerment, and economic independence at the grassroots level.

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24 states and 135 districts reached across India.

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35,000 aspiring women entrepreneurs empowered with digital and financial literacy.

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1 million women in local communities equipped with digital and financial knowledge.

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350 health-SoochnaPreneurs deployed as facilitators to promote menstrual health awareness and support sustainable practices.

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Know more about the program





# Rural Digital Immersion Program - RuralDiP

RuralDiP is open for educational, training, professional, and recreational purposes. The program is designed for individuals, groups, researchers, and travellers, allowing them to customise their RuralDiP experience to suit their purpose, needs, and schedule.

Throughout the year, RuralDiP has welcomed various groups and individuals for immersive learning experiences. Some notable visits include:

- RuralDiP Salem (9th June 2024): A Visit to the GI Cluster for Representatives from Dataprev and Brazilian Government Delegates – Representatives from Dataprev and Brazilian Government Delegates visited the GI Cluster in Salem under the DIGI project to observe the impact of digital technology on local artisans' livelihoods and traditional crafts.
- Experiential Workshop with NYU Center for Global Affairs (6th January 2025) – Graduates and faculty members from the New York University Center for Global Affairs participated in an interactive session at the DEF Office. The workshop fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas, showcasing DEF's mission through firsthand stories of grassroots changemakers like SochnaPreneurs and Samarth SochnaPreneurs.

- LOEY Foundation Visit (4th February 2025) – As part of the LOEY 2025 Entrepreneurial Encounters, 23 entrepreneurs and investors from the Netherlands engaged in an interactive session at the DEF Office. The discussion revolved around India's efforts in poverty alleviation, focusing on digital rights and challenges. This session provided a platform for cross-border knowledge exchange on using technology for social good.
- RuralDiP Pondicherry (1st March 2025) – Held at Barkatt House in Auroville, this gathering brought together 20 participants from India, Romania, Thailand, the UK, and other countries. Entrepreneurs, architects, sustainable practitioners, and Auroville community members engaged in discussions on sustainability, circular economy practices, and innovative use of upcycled materials.

Through RuralDiP, participants gain a firsthand understanding of how digital empowerment initiatives are transforming lives, fostering sustainable development, and promoting inclusive growth. Each visit serves as a powerful reminder of the impact of digital technology in bridging the urban-rural divide and creating resilient communities.



336 Community  
Networks are  
being established  
across the country



# Wireless for Communities

## (W4C): Enabling Digital Access in the Hardest-to-Reach Areas

Wireless for Communities (W4C), a flagship initiative of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in partnership with the Internet Society (ISOC), was launched in 2010 to tackle one of India's biggest connectivity challenges, bringing the internet to rural and remote regions where traditional service providers see limited commercial viability.

What makes W4C unique is its community-driven approach. Instead of relying on large telecom networks, the program empowers local communities to build, manage, and maintain their own wireless networks using low-cost technology and unlicensed spectrum bands. This model not only ensures sustainable connectivity but also trains local entrepreneurs, including women, as wireless engineers and network operators, strengthening digital self-sufficiency.

For communities isolated due to geographical barriers, lack of internet access limits their ability to participate in the digital economy, access government services, or gain essential information. W4C transforms this by enabling affordable and reliable connectivity, supporting education, healthcare, livelihoods, and fostering hyperlocal digital content that sustains local economies.

W4C faces hurdles such as harsh terrains, lack of infrastructure, regulatory constraints, and

affordability. Yet, DEF continues to push boundaries through innovative models like PM-WANI, which was recognised in the G20 Compendium of Case Studies for its impact on democratising internet access. By fostering community ownership of digital infrastructure, W4C is more than a connectivity solution—it is a blueprint for equitable digital inclusion, proving that even the most remote villages can be active participants in the digital era.

*More than 1000 villages are being connected with access to education, opportunities and livelihood*

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*More than 500 women wireless engineers have been trained*

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*Watch our films*



*Read our Publications*





# Innovations



DEF  
e

TEAM



When CITIZENS are media literate  
Parental Influence & Impact  
Sponsorship  
Surveillance

The Agitator  
The Manipulator  
MIL Villains  
All heroes equal with AACRA  
ACCESS  
analyze  
create  
control

VIRTUAL FOR EDUCATION

# Bytes Beyond Bandwidth (3B) - Mobile Comm Centre

The Bytes Beyond Bandwidth (3B) Mobile Comm Centre is a cutting-edge, all-terrain vehicle designed to provide 24x7 emergency communication in remote, rural, and underserved areas. Developed to ensure meaningful connectivity during disasters, emergencies, or in regions with poor network infrastructure, the 3B vehicle uses a combination of advanced communication technologies to bridge the digital divide.

Equipped with satellite links, VHF relays, HF communication systems, long-range Wi-Fi, and GSM networks, the 3B Mobile Comm Centre ensures reliable data and voice connectivity even in areas where traditional telecom infrastructure is unavailable or compromised. The vehicle's capabilities are particularly

valuable in disaster-prone regions, geographically isolated areas, and locations affected by economic or infrastructural limitations.

Through partnerships with organisations like the Internet Society Foundation, the initiative aims to reach 10 disaster-prone and marginalised areas across India. By deploying the 3B vehicle, communities gain access to essential information, enabling better disaster response, communication, and coordination.

Whether supporting emergency services, providing connectivity for relief operations, or assisting rural communities with digital inclusion, the 3B Mobile Comm Centre exemplifies the power of innovative technology in ensuring connectivity for all.





टे घटक

सुपना साक्षात्कार पाठकपुस्तक  
सुपना साक्षात्कार कल्पित युवा  
सुपना साक्षात्कार कथा

THE MULTIVERSE OF

# DIGITAL FALLACIES



# MIL Kit for the Multiverse of Digital Fallacies

The Humara MIL Kit for the Multiverse of Digital Fallacies is a part of Digital Empowerment Foundation's Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives to enable people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media, as well as to become skillful creators and producers of information and media messages in their own right. An understanding of MIL would also help communities that are getting online to have a better understanding of misinformation, online trolling, stereotypes, prejudices, and other online threats.



Read more about  
the MIL Kit



Watch for more info



# MUSEUM of digital Society

LEARN, TO LEARN  
182, P. 182, P. 182



Digital is a 21st century tool of communication, between government, education and social services. Digital has become a language of the 21st century, and therefore, the digital society is the future of the 21st century. Digital is a language of the 21st century, and therefore, the digital society is the future of the 21st century.

With the advent of Internet in India in 1995, India is almost the largest digital society in the world. Digital has become a language of the 21st century, and therefore, the digital society is the future of the 21st century. Digital is a language of the 21st century, and therefore, the digital society is the future of the 21st century.

The museum has been established in order to create a network of communication with people from all over the world. Digital is a language of the 21st century, and therefore, the digital society is the future of the 21st century.

The Museum of Digital Society is a collection of the most diverse forms of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), encompassing the growing fields of digital technology. Through an extensive history of digital technology, the museum is a collection of the most diverse forms of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), encompassing the growing fields of digital technology.



# MUSEUM of digital Society



# Museum of Digital Society

Digital is a 21st Century tool of communication, media, business, governance, activism and social norms. Digital isn't merely technology—it's life, a medium, innovation, and marketing. Yet, critical questions arise: who controls and benefits from this digital existence? Whose narratives remain unheard? However, the larger society is constantly being left out or excluded and either data fields or data mined for control and appropriation. These questions have guided our journey.

With the advent of Internet in India on 15th August 1995; India is almost the largest digitally appropriated user population of the Internet and digital tools. On one end there is a lot of discussion on information society, surveillance, online hate speech, digital interference, virtual domination, and the list of digital jargons seems to be never ending, while on the other end, there is still a huge population reaching out to gain access. The journey of DEF has witnessed a very dynamic shift and complex evolution of the digital divide over the years in terms of impact. The continuous learnings have helped to empower the organisation to skilfully and creatively find solutions that aid in bridging the gaps of the digital world. Yet, the country which has 665,000 villages, 250,000 Panchayats, 7,274 blocks, 28 States and 8 Union Territories, 780 spoken languages, and 70% of the population belonging

to Dalit, Bahujan, and OBC; more than 50 percent of the population have never used Internet and another 25% are not meaningfully connected.

The Museum of Digital Society serves as a testament to the two-decade journey of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), encapsulating its pioneering efforts in digital development. Through an extensive historical archive, the museum chronicles DEF's transformative models of digital inclusion and empowerment, highlighting the role of frugal technologies built for last-mile communities. This repository of knowledge, shared through books, publications, and case studies, tells the story of how digital interventions can bring social change. The museum not only celebrates digital integration but also emphasises access, rights, and entrepreneurship in the digital age. It stands as a beacon of DEF's mission to bridge the digital divide, showcasing how storytelling and technology can empower marginalised communities. Ultimately, the museum reflects the evolution of a truly inclusive digital society—where technology serves as a tool for equity, innovation, and opportunity for all. Museum of Digital Society is an effort to create a living ecosystem of the learnings of 23 years of Digital Empowerment Foundation and demonstrate the same for larger masses to experience, live, learn, and replicate.

DEF will be taking MIL and critical digital literacy to all government functionaries as part of MIL@@P, being implemented by the govt. of Telangana



## MIL@@P: Media Information Literacy Awareness and Action Program

There is a considerable difference in the consumption of digital information in rural and urban India. According to the “India Inequality Report 2022: Digital Divide”, only 31 per cent of the rural population uses the internet, in contrast to 67 per cent of their urban counterparts. The study has also shown that urban India is 12 to 14 per cent more likely to own a mobile phone than rural India. As per another study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, only 29 per cent of India can access the Internet compared to 64 percent of the urban population.

Research conducted by DEF also highlighted the increasing use of digital platforms to spread misinformation, disinformation, cyber fraud, and online harassment. The rapid integration of digital tools, especially after COVID-19, has made both younger and older generations highly susceptible to digital wrongs. A 2023 IAMA report found that over 52% of Indians have encountered misinformation online, with rural populations being disproportionately affected. Additionally, a Microsoft Digital Civility Index report (2022) highlighted that 74% of Indian internet users experienced cyber threats, including fraud and misinformation.

MIL@@P is a part of DEF’s Media and Information Literacy (MIL) initiatives to enable people to interpret and make informed judgments as users of information and media, as well as to become skillful creators and producers

20,000 women have been enabled in critical digital literacy

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6,000 students have been connected to comprehensive media and information literacy

---

2,000 information agents enabled with critical thinking and online safety and security tools

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of information and media messages in their own right. An understanding of MIL would also help communities that are getting online to have a better understanding of misinformation, online trolling, stereotypes, prejudices, and other online threats.

We have done this by developing a toolkit, gamifying concepts of understanding conscious use of digital platforms, adding 4 extensive modules on critical digital literacy and aiding discussions, and adding this as a subject-matter for policy and advocacy related change at the grassroots, local and global level.



Read more about  
the initiative





Governance &  
Citizen Services

The Governance & Citizen Services pillar of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is dedicated to strengthening grassroots democracy and enhancing governance through digital interventions. By bridging the gap between citizens and the government, DEF empowers communities to actively participate in decision-making processes and access their rights and entitlements.

Through digital literacy, capacity building, and e-governance solutions, DEF ensures transparent, accountable, and efficient service delivery. By enabling citizens to navigate government systems and advocate for their needs, DEF drives inclusive governance and amplifies the voices of marginalised communities.



# Smartpur

Smartpur, a pioneering initiative by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in collaboration with Nokia, is redefining the concept of smart villages by integrating technology with social, economic, and ecological transformation. Implemented across multiple regions, including Vizag and Chirala in Andhra Pradesh, Bharatpur and Tijara in Rajasthan, Nuh in Haryana, Barabanki and Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh, Kollegal in Karnataka, and Choutupal in Telangana, Smartpur envisions rural India as a hub of digital empowerment and sustainable development.

Unlike traditional smart village models that focus solely on digital infrastructure, Smartpur ensures that technology is meaningfully woven into daily life. The initiative goes beyond connectivity by training local entrepreneurs, enabling access to services, and fostering self-reliant communities. At its core, Smartpur empowers rural citizens to use digital tools for education, governance, finance, and health, ensuring long-term socio-economic impact.

In many parts of India, the lack of digital access isolates communities from essential services, financial opportunities, and government support. Smartpur bridges this gap by enhancing digital literacy and career guidance for students and youth, equipping them with the skills needed for a digital economy. It also improves rural healthcare access through telemedicine services, ensuring timely medical consultations. Additionally, the initiative trains SochnaPreneurs

(information agents) to drive financial inclusion, enabling rural populations to access banking and financial services seamlessly. By raising awareness of government schemes and digital governance tools, Smartpur empowers communities to claim their entitlements and actively participate in the country's digital transformation.

In 2024-25 alone, over 33,000 beneficiaries have experienced the transformative impact of Smartpur, proving that true progress lies not in technology itself, but in how communities harness it. By championing digital inclusion and rural entrepreneurship, Smartpur is shaping a future where villages are not just connected, but self-sufficient, resilient, and truly smart.

**33,000 community members is been impacted through the program this year**

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**And total impact is more than a half million in last 6 years**

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View Smartpur

Movies >>



Smartpur Website >>



## Soochna Adhikar Kendra



In an era where big data and digital governance drive decision-making, millions in rural India remain unaware of the critical information and welfare schemes designed for their well-being. This widening gap stems from limited digital access and lack of awareness, preventing many from benefiting from government entitlements and social welfare programs. To address this challenge, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in partnership with TATA Power, has established Soochna Adhikar Kendras (Community Information Resource Centres) across Bhavnagar in Gujarat, Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh, and Pokhran and Bikaner in Rajasthan.

What makes Soochna Adhikar Kendras unique is their focus on community-driven digital empowerment. These centres go beyond offering internet access—they equip marginalised communities with essential digital skills, enabling

them to navigate e-governance platforms, access government schemes, and improve their livelihoods. By integrating digital literacy, entrepreneurship training, and financial inclusion, these centres serve as gateways to the information economy for underserved populations.

For rural populations, especially persons with disabilities (PwDs), migrant workers, women-led Self-Help Groups, and unemployed youth, digital exclusion limits their ability to access healthcare, financial aid, education, and employment opportunities. Soochna Adhikar Kendras bridge this gap by providing digital literacy training, enabling individuals to access essential services, offering skills for entrepreneurship and livelihood generation and facilitating access to government welfare schemes, ensuring rightful beneficiaries receive support.

So far, the initiative has reached 11,106 beneficiaries, with 3,121 individuals

successfully accessing government schemes. By fostering entitlement linkages and digital inclusion, Soochna Adhikar Kendras are not just improving connectivity—they are reshaping rural empowerment, ensuring that no one is left behind in India's digital transformation.

10,000 community members has been connected with various State and Central government schemes

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Access &  
Infrastructure



# Totopara Internet Connectivity Project



The Totopara Internet Connectivity Project, led by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) with support from 48percent.org, is a groundbreaking initiative aimed at bridging the digital divide for the Toto Tribe, one of India's smallest and most endangered indigenous communities. With a population of approximately 1,600, the Totos reside in Totopara village in the Alipurduar District of West Bengal, facing extreme geographical isolation and limited access to modern infrastructure. This project ensures sustainable digital inclusion, preserving Toto cultural identity while equipping future generations with essential technological skills.

Recognising that mere connectivity is not enough, the initiative integrates LTE Internet Boosters and the PM-WANI Scheme to provide reliable internet access. At the heart of this project is a Community Information Resource Centre (CIRC)—a hub designed to offer digital literacy, STEM education, and access to essential services. Through this centre, community members gain exposure to educational tools, e-governance services, and livelihood opportunities, ensuring that technology strengthens, rather than erodes, their traditional way of life. As an endangered indigenous group, the Toto Tribe faces significant

challenges in preserving their heritage while adapting to the modern world. Digital access is not just about economic opportunities; it is vital for archiving oral traditions, accessing healthcare, and engaging with the wider world without losing cultural roots.

So far, 200 community members have been trained in digital literacy, 200 students have received STEM education, and over 400 individuals report improved access to the internet. The Totopara Internet Connectivity Project is more than a connectivity initiative—it is a model

for how digital empowerment can uplift indigenous communities while safeguarding their heritage for generations to come.

200 Community Members  
have been trained in digital  
literacy 200 Students have  
received STEM education  
400 community members  
have reported improved  
access to the internet.

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## Uttarakhand Wireless Aid Community Network



The Uttarakhand Wireless Aid Community Network, initiated by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in collaboration with the Internet Society (ISOC), is a pioneering effort to bring resilient internet infrastructure to 10 remote villages in Uttarakhand, a region frequently affected by floods and landslides. Given the geographical challenges and vulnerability to natural disasters, ensuring uninterrupted communication is critical for disaster preparedness, emergency response, and long-term digital inclusion.

Unlike conventional internet networks that often fail during disasters, this initiative leverages mesh networks and advanced internet technology to create a robust, decentralised communication

system. Each village is linked through wireless mesh networks, with elevated communication terminals and power backups, ensuring connectivity even during power outages or infrastructure breakdowns.

In remote mountainous regions, the lack of internet access isolates communities from essential services such as healthcare, financial aid, education, and government support. Establishing reliable digital infrastructure is crucial in bridging this gap, as it facilitates real-time communication during emergencies, reducing disaster response time and ensuring timely assistance. Additionally, it supports economic opportunities by enabling access to digital markets and financial services, allowing local entrepreneurs to participate in the digital economy.

Moreover, community information centres play a vital role in empowering residents by providing digital literacy training and access to essential online services, fostering long-term resilience and inclusion in the digital world.

Beyond connectivity, information centres in each village serve as digital hubs, providing emergency response resources, digital education, and essential government services. This initiative demonstrates how technology can bridge the digital divide in disaster-prone, geographically challenging

areas, ensuring that vulnerable communities remain connected, informed, and empowered.

10 centres established,  
expanding digital access in  
disaster-prone areas

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3,865 beneficiaries reached,  
enhancing community  
resilience and connectivity

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# Education and Empowerment

At Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), we believe that access to information is the key to unlocking endless possibilities. Through our Education & Empowerment pillar, we are committed to bridging the digital divide by equipping communities with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in a connected world.

From digital literacy training to skill development programs, DEF empowers individuals – especially women, youth, persons with disabilities, and the elderly – to access education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and government services. By harnessing the power of technology, we are not only fostering digital inclusion but also building pathways for economic empowerment and social growth.

## YuWaah



YuWaah is a transformative initiative focused on equipping young people aged 15-27 with job-relevant skills through high-quality learning content and education technology solutions. A core component of this initiative is Passport to Earning (P2E), a flagship Learning Management System (LMS) designed to provide free skilling opportunities that prepare youth for employment. In India, this platform operates as YuWaah Skills, offering a wide range of courses tailored to the evolving job market.

YuWaah is a Public-Private-Youth Partnership (PPYP) hosted by UNICEF, working collaboratively with multiple stakeholders to ensure inclusive access to skill development

programs. Through strategic partnerships, the initiative integrates cutting-edge digital learning tools, empowering young learners to build essential competencies for career success.

By bridging the gap between education and employment, YuWaah plays a crucial role in enhancing youth employability and workforce readiness, helping young individuals unlock new career opportunities and achieve economic independence.

35,000 learners benefitted from this program in soft skills

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# DigiLAMP



The Luminous Advanced Mentoring Program (LAMP), initiated by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), is a transformative initiative designed to equip children and students with life skills, soft skills, and digital literacy. Implemented across key project locations—Gagret and Baddi in Himachal Pradesh, Haridwar in Uttarakhand, Hosur in Tamil Nadu, and Gurugram in Haryana—LAMP ensures that students from diverse backgrounds gain critical digital and functional literacy, bridging the gap between traditional education and modern technological demands.

Unlike conventional digital literacy programs, LAMP follows a structured offline model, making learning accessible and inclusive for students regardless of their prior digital exposure. The curriculum is gender-neutral and tailored to different learning levels, ensuring equal participation from both boys and girls. With a strong emphasis on interactive activities, workbook exercises, and facilitator-supported sessions, the program fosters engagement, critical thinking, and

problem-solving skills.

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, digital literacy is no longer optional—it is essential for academic success, future employment, and overall empowerment. LAMP not only teaches students how to use digital tools effectively but also integrates functional literacy certification through DEF's Digital Academy, providing them with formal recognition of their skills.

In 2024-25, LAMP has successfully delivered digital literacy to 841 students, with 241 students in Gagret, 160 in Baddi, 150 in Haridwar, 220 in Hosur, and 60 in Gurugram. By bridging the digital divide, this initiative is equipping young learners with essential skills for their personal, academic, and professional growth, preparing them to thrive in a technology-driven future.

Delivered digital literacy to over 841 students across five project locations.

## Digitally Enabling the Champion Sakhi's



In collaboration with CRISIL Foundation and RGVN, Digital Empowerment Foundation implemented a project to digitally empower 150 Champion Sakhis in rural Assam. The initiative focused on ICT enablement, financial and digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and service facilitation, aiming to transform rural women into digitally skilled entrepreneurs and service providers.

Through a structured four-phase intervention—featuring in-person training, app-based learning, digital workshops, and enterprise support—the project equipped participants

with the tools and skills needed to offer digital services, access government schemes, manage financial records, and engage in online business activities.

The project resulted in significant improvements in digital literacy, confidence, and entrepreneurship among the women, with many expressing interest in joining DEF's SoochnaPreneur model. Participants now run service centers offering digital solutions and government scheme facilitation, contributing to both their financial independence and their community's digital inclusion.

## Beyond the Basics: Digital Literacy Experiences

A group of rural women demonstrates that learning opportunities exist for every age group in a distant rural area. These women, known as Champion Sakhis, use their curiosity together with smartphones and their passion for learning to enter the digital world with both pride and confidence. Initially, it was a wonder what attributes made these women turn into champions. These women are determined and full of enthusiasm. All women across every age group trust in continual learning and display adaptive behaviours while supporting others. The group continues its mission of financial literacy through digital education to eliminate the digital divide. The training sessions for digital literacy were intentionally prepared by the organisers. Each session expanded their entrepreneurial skills until they developed confidence as independent entrepreneurs. It was deeply motivating that every Sakhi attended the sessions, possessing a smartphone. Their possession of smartphones demonstrated a solid indication that they were ready to continue. Watching the learners discover their email ID on their smartphones without help brought out tremendous pride on their faces. The Sakhi participants practised smartphone set-up procedures while learning to identify screen icons and enabled Bluetooth file transfers, and explored camera functions for videos and photos and call recording capabilities. The learners grasped that permission needed to be sought before call recording, since it presented

itself as an essential new concept. The Sakhi member specified that the call recording function would aid her information retention because performing regular household tasks sometimes caused her to forget essential details. The facility to erase old recordings became a fundamental digital practice which students mastered to make space available on their devices. The learning did not stop there. Google Maps and location sharing functions brought forth a transformative experience for them.

The Sakhis felt joyful because they learned they could inform family members of their location during training trips. This feature provided more than just convenience because it also ensured safety. Learning how to send emails was the most moving aspect of their training. The new skill of sending documents independently meant they no longer needed access to internet cafes. Beyond teaching basic skills, the five-hour workshops delivered numerous benefits beyond technical skill acquisition. Through the educational sessions, the Sakhis gained independence while developing personal confidence along with goal direction. The participants learned to utilise their smartphones beyond basic calls by developing capable methods to collect information and maintain safe data sharing capabilities. Through their learning, these women have become leaders who serve as true Champion Sakhis by helping others navigate their communities.

## SoochnaPreneur - Community Information Resource Centre (SP-CIRC)



In partnership with Dvara and the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), the SoochnaPreneur – Community Information Resource Centres (SP CIRC)s project empowers rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu with digital and entrepreneurial skills. Implemented in West Champaran, Bokaro, and Salem, the project has selected and trained 12 women SoochnaPreneurs to run digitally equipped Community Information Resource Centres (CIRC)s offering essential services to their communities.

Each SoochnaPreneur will mentor and train 200 rural women, reaching 2,400 women through hands-on modules in functional digital literacy, digital financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. These trainings

aim to boost women’s confidence in using smartphones, the internet, digital banking, and starting micro-enterprises. To promote sustainable livelihoods and digital inclusion, the project is also setting up 12 Udyam Soochna Seva Kendras, each expected to deliver 1,000 digital services annually, including access to government schemes, financial transactions, and digital documentation.

Additionally, 3,000 individuals will be profiled using DEF’s MeraApp to connect them to welfare entitlements. The SP CIRC initiative not only bridges the digital divide but also fosters women-led entrepreneurship, promoting financial independence and inclusive development in underserved rural communities.

# SkillUP: Opening Digital Frontiers to Women and Youth



Digital Empowerment Foundation, in partnership with Dentsu India, is designed to help rural women and youth learn important digital skills. The project sets up 50 digital training centres in 10 Indian states, giving people the tools and knowledge they need to succeed in today's digital world.

Each centre is led by a trained local woman, called a SoochnaPreneur, who teaches digital literacy, soft skills, storytelling, and basic knowledge about Artificial Intelligence (AI). These SoochnaPreneurs are not only trainers—they are role models and leaders in their communities. Through this project, they aim to

train 60,000 women and youth over six months.

The program provides an 18-hour training course delivered over five months. Along with the main training, the project includes monitoring progress, supporting participants, and offering follow-up learning opportunities to make sure the impact lasts.

The SoochnaPreneurs can offer paid digital services like printing, online form filling, and digital literacy sessions, helping them earn income and run the centres as small businesses. This model supports long-term sustainability and empowers women to become independent digital entrepreneurs.

Market and Social  
Entreprise

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is focused on fostering sustainable livelihoods by empowering local entrepreneurs, artisans, and small businesses. Through the strategic use of digital tools and technology-driven solutions, DEF enables rural and underserved communities to access new markets, expand their businesses, and achieve economic independence.

By bridging the gap between traditional skills and modern marketplaces, DEF supports social enterprises that promote inclusive growth. Through capacity-building programs, digital marketing training, and e-commerce platforms, artisans and entrepreneurs are equipped to showcase their products, connect with wider consumer bases, and ensure fair trade opportunities.

# Udyamini

In rural India, women are not just caregivers—they are economic anchors, driving micro-enterprises that make up 20% of all MSMEs and employ 22-27 million people. However, despite their ambition and resilience, systemic barriers such as lack of formal credit, policy support, and business development services hinder their growth. The gender digital divide further exacerbates these challenges, as women face limited access to technology, digital literacy, and market opportunities.

To bridge this gap, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in collaboration with seven social organisations and with co-financial support from a US-based grantmaker, has launched Udyamini—a transformative initiative designed to strengthen the Rural Women Entrepreneurs (RWEs) ecosystem through digital-first solutions. Currently active in 12 districts in Assam and 6 in West Bengal, Udyamini integrates incubation, acceleration, and mentoring models to enable women-led businesses to thrive.

Udyamini leverages Information Communication Technology (ICT) to equip RWEs with essential digital tools, business facilitation services, skill-building programs, and access to public-private support systems. This ensures that women entrepreneurs are not only connected to resources but also gain the digital fluency needed to expand their enterprises in

a tech-driven economy.

A key pillar of Udyamini is its network of 200 digitally empowered women facilitators, known as SooknaPreneurs, who act as rural business development executives. Through their SooknaPreneur Business Mitra Service Centres, they provide RWEs with digital solutions, market linkages, financial literacy, and enterprise support across the value chain, while also catering to the broader digital service needs of their communities.

So far, Udyamini has empowered over 20,000 RWEs, evenly distributed across Assam and West Bengal. By integrating digital entrepreneurship solutions and breaking gender barriers, the program is redefining rural economies, ensuring that women-led businesses not only survive but flourish in an increasingly digital world.

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Impacted over 20,000 rural women entrepreneurs

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200 digitally empowered rural women

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Read more about the program







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## DCDP- DIGI (The Digital Cluster Development Program (DCDP) for GI Destinations in Tamil Nadu)

The Digital Cluster Development Program (DCDP) is a transformative initiative launched in collaboration with Standard Chartered Bank to digitally empower artisans in Tamil Nadu while preserving and promoting the region's rich cultural heritage. India is home to over seven million artisans, many of whom struggle with economic instability due to exploitative supply chains, low wages, and lack of direct market access. Despite contributing significantly to the country's cultural economy, artisans often face marginalisation, with middlemen taking a large share of profits, leaving them with minimal earnings.

The program focuses on Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged products, such as Kanchipuram silk sarees and Chettinad crafts, which are deeply rooted in Tamil Nadu's traditions and geographical identity. Despite their cultural significance, artisans in these clusters often face challenges such as limited market access, lack of digital skills, and financial exclusion, which hinder their ability to sustain and scale their crafts in a rapidly evolving economy.

DCDP addresses these barriers by equipping local artisans, youth, and women with digital literacy, entrepreneurial skills, social media marketing, and financial literacy. This comprehensive approach enables them to expand their reach in both domestic and global markets, ensuring the sustainability of their crafts and fostering economic

independence.

The program has made a significant impact across three key locations, training 64 artisans in apparel and garment making, 509 artisans in entrepreneurial skills, 42 artisans in core digital design, and 41 artisans in product finishing and packaging. Additionally, 515 individuals have been equipped with essential digital literacy skills, empowering them to integrate modern digital tools into their businesses. These efforts have helped artisans overcome traditional market limitations by enabling them to showcase and sell their products

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Apparel & Garment Making:  
64 artisans trained

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Entrepreneurial Skills Training:  
509 artisans empowered

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Digital Design Training: 42  
artisans skilled

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Product Finishing &  
Packaging: 41 artisans  
supported

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Digital Literacy: 515  
individuals equipped with  
essential digital skills

---

through e-commerce platforms and digital marketplaces.

A key aspect of the program is its focus on financial literacy, enabling artisans to manage digital payments, online transactions, and profitability—a crucial step toward sustainable entrepreneurship. By blending tradition with innovation, DCDP not only preserves Tamil Nadu’s artisanal heritage but also creates pathways for sustainable livelihoods and self-reliance.

Through these efforts, the program is revolutionising the artisan economy, ensuring that heritage craftsmanship thrives in the digital era.

Watch the  
Program movie



Read our program reports:

*Digital Cluster Development  
Program for Geographical  
Indication (GI) Destinations,  
Tamil Nadu*



*Let's GI Mela Report*





## Nano SheMaker: Social Change Maker Building Communities of Digital Trust

The Nano SheMaker project is a bold step toward reshaping the digital future of India's most skilled yet underserved communities. In collaboration with ZVC India, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is creating opportunities where they matter most—among rural women, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), and artisans in backward districts and Geographical Indication (GI) clusters across Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.

Through this initiative, 50 women and PwDs are selected, trained, and supported to become SoochnaPreneurs—local digital entrepreneurs who run community-based information centres. These centres serve as digital lifelines, offering access to online services, government schemes, digital literacy training, and e-commerce support. Each SoochnaPreneur leads change in her own district, reaching artisans, weavers, and women with the skills and tools they need to thrive in a digital world.

The project equips these changemakers with training across 6 essential modules: digital literacy, financial literacy, digital marketing, e-commerce, storytelling through visual media, and entitlement services. In doing so, we not only

unlock the potential of 10,000 women and PwDs but also enhance the digital presence and earning potential of 1,200 artisan households from GI clusters such as Chanderi, Pochampally, Warangal, and Dhar.

The project will activate 50 SoochnaPreneur Centres, deliver 1,00,000 digital services, and train entire communities in how to connect, create, and grow in the digital economy. Artisans learn to showcase their products on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp, while also gaining access to national and global markets like Amazon, Flipkart, Etsy, and ONDC.

From setting up digital service centres to running photography workshops and documenting artisan stories, every element of this program is designed for long-term impact. As the centres grow into trusted community hubs, they continue to deliver digital services and training, ensuring that the ripple effect of empowerment carries forward long after the project ends.

Nano SheMaker stands as a model of what's possible when inclusion meets innovation. Together with ZVC India, we are shaping a future where digital access leads to dignity, livelihood, and lasting change—one SoochnaPreneur at a time.



Research &  
Advocacy

The Research & Advocacy pillar of Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is dedicated to generating knowledge, shaping policy, and driving systemic change in the digital ecosystem. DEF conducts in-depth research, monitoring, and evaluation of projects, producing comprehensive documentation such as baseline and endline assessments, impact studies, and research reports.

Through advocacy-driven policy briefs and fundamental research initiatives—including Algorithmic Chronicles, circular economy, just transition, rural fact-checking, and platform accountability—DEF examines emerging challenges and opportunities in the digital landscape. By fostering informed dialogue and evidence-based policymaking, DEF strengthens the foundation for an inclusive, rights-based, and accountable digital future.

# Art and Collective for Digital Empowerment

In a world driven by change, where collaboration and creativity merge, a collective emerges to harness the transformative potential of the arts. A-CODE (Art and Collectives for Digital Empowerment) is an effort to enhance collaboration among civil society organisations working across different sectors, advocating for the inclusion of the arts as a central force for social change. A-CODE is a platform supported by 20 organisations and individuals committed to preserving and reimagining art, expression, culture, and heritage. Through this initiative, we innovate, experiment, and push the boundaries of artistic expression to create lasting social impact.

A-CODE utilises various artistic formats to communicate social issues, amplify voices, and envision community-driven development. From painting, writing, film, music, and design to heritage crafts, social media activism, and digital storytelling, the program explores 12 key thematic areas where art can drive dialogue, inspire action, and create inclusive spaces for marginalised voices. It actively works with artisans, artists, social impact groups, indigenous communities, tribal groups, and ethnic collectives, ensuring that traditional and contemporary artistic expressions serve as powerful tools for advocacy, empowerment, and storytelling.

At the heart of A-CODE lies a commitment to local solutions

and community-led initiatives. Recognising that art has historically played a crucial role in shaping societies, we believe that integrating artistic expression into development discourse fosters a more inclusive, empathetic, and culturally rooted approach to problem-solving. Through DEFDialogues, meetings, engagements, webinars, seminars, conferences, podcasts, research initiatives, and cultural celebrations, A-CODE creates a space for meaningful exchange, bridging the gap between artistic communities and social development organisations.

Art for social change is a way in which we can actually bring in inclusivity and social-behavioural change through innovative programs. It challenges norms, gives voice to the unheard, and helps shape alternative futures. By fostering civil society collaborations, A-CODE is not just preserving traditions but reimagining them—making art a force that influences policy, strengthens identities, and builds more equitable and peaceful societies.

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20+ National and International Partner Organisations

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24+ fellows to propagate art for social change

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Read our publications



Watch our media archives



# TypeRight



TypeRight is a weekly digital bulletin that explores key issues in the online world, covering topics such as digital rights, misinformation, online exclusion, and the impact of technology on society. Designed as a “Digital Nukkad” (a street corner for discussions), TypeRight curates news, expert analyses, and grassroots perspectives on India’s evolving digital landscape.

With a strong focus on algorithmic bias, data privacy, censorship, and digital inequalities, TypeRight brings together voices from researchers, activists, technologists, and communities to highlight how digital advancements shape people’s lives. The blog examines digital and social exclusions in India and across the world, offering brief yet insightful analyses while keeping these

discussions within the context of DEF’s interventions and initiatives.

TypeRight has published 120 chapters, covering a wide range of critical topics that connect technology, governance, and social justice. By bridging the gap between policy discussions and real-world experiences, TypeRight helps readers understand complex digital challenges in a clear and accessible way. Through awareness and dialogue, TypeRight empowers individuals to engage with digital issues and advocate for a fairer, more inclusive digital future.



Read all the chapters of TypeRight



## TypeRight - The Digital Nukkad

TypeRight - The Digital Nukkad, is a weekly conversational bulletin curated through the news and discussions on social media as well as what's happening on the ground. Through the eyes and ears of Digital Empowerment Foundation...

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ABOUT



### Chapter 120: Youth and the Internet - Reflections from the 7th Youth IGF Forum

This week's typeright is based on reflections by Mairi Singh, from DEF's Research and Advocacy Division, who attended the 7th Youth IGF forum last month at IIM Bangalore.

TypeRight - The Digital Nukkad

1



### Chapter 119: What are we Reading in 2025?

This week, TypeRight explores what the research team at DEF is reading in the...

TypeRight - The Digital Nukkad



### Chapter 118: Open AI is not so Open, but Chin(AI) might be?

This week, TypeRight takes a dig into the new AI contender and what it means for...

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### Chapter 117: Town Halls X Trump Towers

Two years ago, Elon Musk acquired Twitter, rebranded it X, and some of us...

TypeRight - The Digital Nukkad



# Enabling Communities in Jharkhand in India to Diversify in Economic Opportunities

Jharkhand, a resource-rich but economically vulnerable state in eastern India, has long been dependent on coal mining and coal-based industries. While these sectors have historically provided employment and revenue, they have also created systemic dependence, limiting long-term economic sustainability and increasing environmental vulnerabilities. The urgent need for economic diversification in Jharkhand is not just about shifting away from coal—it is about ensuring that communities have access to alternative and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

As India progresses toward its net-zero emissions target by 2070, transitioning from fossil fuels to low-carbon energy sources has become imperative. However, coal-dependent districts lack comprehensive research and strategic planning on economic diversification. Without clear pathways for alternative employment and skill development, workers and communities risk being left behind in this energy transition.

To bridge this gap, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and Swaniti Initiative collaborated on a field-based study to identify viable economic opportunities beyond coal in Jharkhand. The initiative focused on stakeholder engagement and social dialogue, bringing together policymakers, local entrepreneurs,

and community representatives to ensure a just and inclusive transition. It also emphasised data-driven decision-making through extensive household and enterprise surveys to assess skills, existing industries, and potential economic activities. Additionally, grassroots participation was strengthened to ensure that local communities had a voice in shaping policies that directly impact their livelihoods. The project further supported the Jharkhand Task Force for Sustainable Just Transition, launched in 2022, by providing research insights and mobilising community participation to drive long-term economic resilience.

By leveraging local knowledge, digital tools, and policy advocacy, this initiative lays the groundwork for a future where Jharkhand's communities thrive beyond coal dependency. Sustainable economic pathways—ranging from agriculture, rural enterprises, digital entrepreneurship, and green energy solutions—can drive long-term resilience and inclusive growth.

A just transition cannot be imposed from the top down—it must emerge from within the communities affected. Through this initiative, DEF and Swaniti Initiative are ensuring that Jharkhand's economic future is shaped by the voices of its people, backed by robust research and inclusive planning.

Read the Program Reports



*A study on “Just Transition and Economic Diversification of Jharkhand’s Coal Heartland: Ground-up Studies from Ramgarh and Bokaro*



*Digital Just Transition: Digital Pathways for Community-centered Just Transition*



# Event Highlights





# Digital Artisans of India Award



India's artisan community, with over 200 million people, plays a vital role in the country's cultural and economic fabric. The handloom sector alone employs over 3.5 million workers, mostly women, across 470 clusters. Despite challenges, the Indian handicrafts market is projected to grow to US\$ 5,583.9 million by 2028. Recognising the need for digital integration, the Digital Artisans of India Award was launched in 2023 by Digital Empowerment Foundation, Digikargha, and Creative Dignity to amplify artisans' voices.

Held on 6th July 2024 at the National Crafts Museum in New Delhi, the event brought together 50 artisans for workshops, exhibitions, and an open mic session where they shared their digital journeys and challenges. Experts conducted workshops on digital branding, market trends, storytelling, and photography, equipping artisans with essential digital skills.

A cultural highlight was Mamta Sapera's performance, breaking gender barriers in Rajasthan's folk music. The event was inaugurated by Dr. Sudha Dhingra (NIFT Delhi) and Dr. Swapna Mishra (Textile Sector Skill Council), who announced educational initiatives for artisans. Over 30 artisans received cash prizes and year-long mentorships. The event concluded with the launch of 'Kargha Tales,' celebrating artisans' resilience and digital empowerment.



Watch the stories of the artisans



Spotlight moments captured



## Just AI Awards: Ethical AI-solutions for Social Good



The Just AI Awards, started in 2024, is a yearly program that recognises innovative and ethical AI solutions initiated by the Digital Empowerment Foundation in collaboration with the Emerging Technologies Wing, Government of Telangana. Supported by esteemed partners such as T-Hub, World Summit Awards, MXR World, Commons Collective, and MediaNama as the media partner, the Awards were a key highlight of the Global AI Summit hosted by the Government of Telangana.

The Just AI Awards honours India's top AI-driven initiatives that effectively harness Artificial Intelligence (AI) to drive social impact at the grassroots level. These initiatives focus on dismantling social and digital barriers, reducing socio-economic inequalities, strengthening crisis response mechanisms, and upholding democratic and feminist principles in the digital space. Special recognition is given to AI solutions that prioritise ethical data

collection, promote gender justice and inclusivity, support linguistic diversity to decolonise the internet, and ensure universal, affordable internet access.

In an era of rapid technological evolution, the Just AI Awards spotlights AI as a force for social good, addressing critical challenges such as task automation ethics, data privacy, algorithmic bias, and discrimination. By celebrating AI innovations with a citizen-centric approach, the Awards champion ethical AI development and promote the responsible use of technology to create a more equitable digital world.



Read more about the awards



Watch the awards highlights

AI SUMMIT

HYDERABAD 2024

SEPTEMBER 5-6 | HICC, HYDERABAD



... for Social Good: J  
Foundation & En  
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**RAKSHITA SW**  
Founder & Director- Social Acc  
Forum for Action and Res

# Digital Citizen Summit (DCS)

Digital Citizen Summit (DCS) is a global multi stakeholder platform initiated by Digital Empowerment Foundation to discuss and deliberate on digital rights and citizenship to advocate for accessible, affordable, and meaningful Internet.

In 2024, the 6th edition of the Digital Citizen Summit was organised in collaboration with the Government of Telangana in Hyderabad. The summit focused on ethics and accountability in artificial intelligence (AI), specifically exploring the challenges and opportunities that AI presents in India and South Asia. With a commitment to democratising the discourse around AI, the event sought to unpack the opacity of technological language and promote broader public understanding and engagement.

The two-day event featured around 20 sessions, including plenary discussions, technical talks, and special sessions, alongside 10 lightning talks. The summit brought together a wide array of participants, including students, researchers, academics, civil society representatives, developers, and public policy professionals, offering them a platform to share their research, experiences, and insights. Attendees engaged in panel discussions, workshops, networking sessions, and paper presentations, fostering collaborative dialogue on the ethical use of AI.

With the theme of “Algorithms, AI, and Accountability,” the summit addressed critical questions surrounding the responsible deployment of AI technologies. It encouraged conversations about transparency, bias mitigation, and equitable AI governance. The insights shared at the summit aimed to inform and inspire actionable change in AI policies and practices across the region.

The success of the Digital Citizen Summit 2024 was made possible through the support of our principal partners, associate partners, outreach partners, session partners, and media partners. Their collaboration and dedication ensured that the summit remained a leading platform for thought leadership and meaningful dialogue on the future of AI and digital rights.



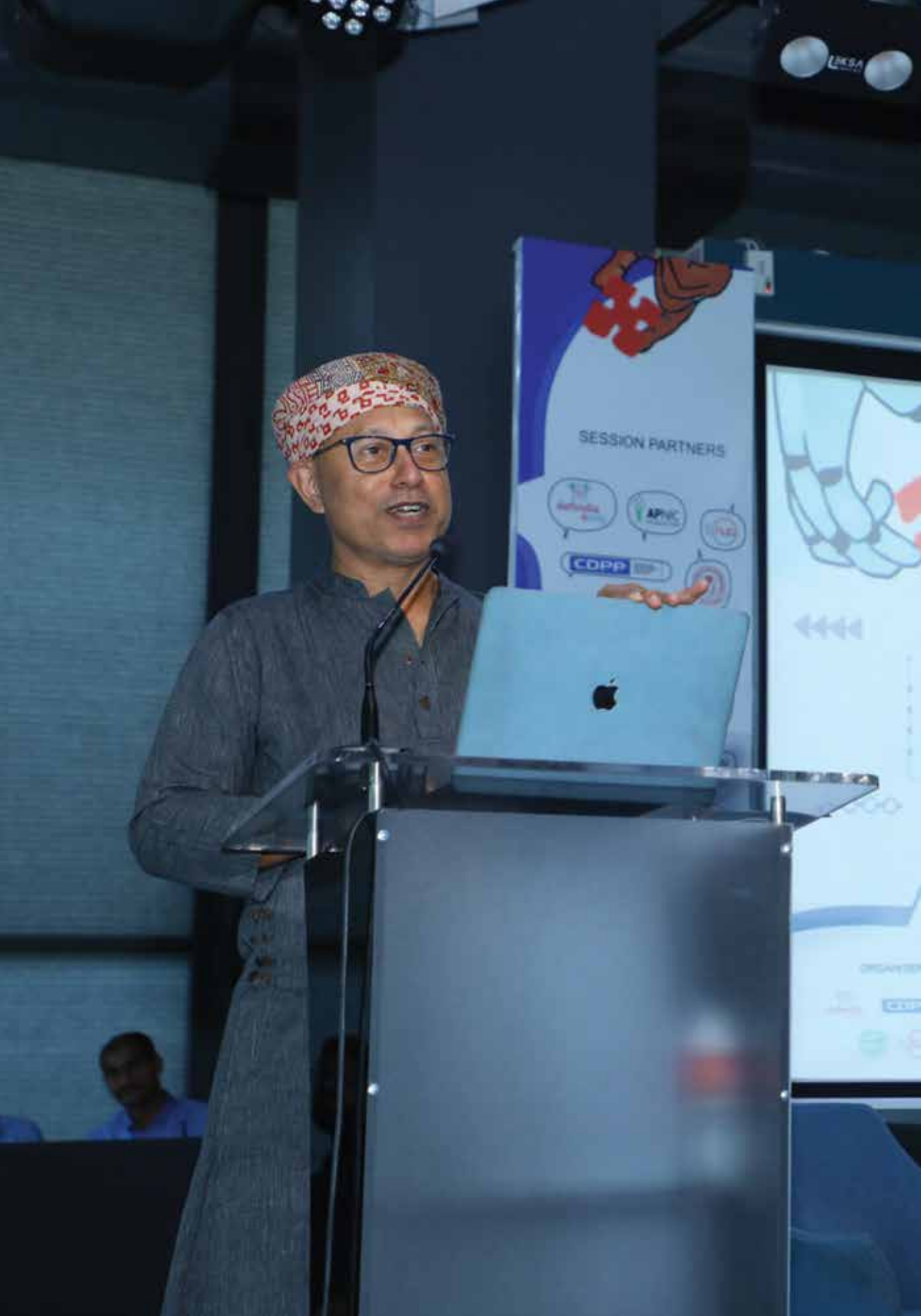
Read the event report



Watch the summit highlights



Spotlight moments captured



SESSION PARTNERS

- APNIC
- CDDP
- Other logos

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|  |   |   |  |  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
|  <p>Check if the host is online</p>             |  <p>VPN</p> <p>Send to the defined channel</p> |  <p>Connect to the defined channel</p> |  <p>Play the card</p>   |  <p>Play the card</p> |
|  <p>DNS</p> <p>Send to the defined channel</p> |  <p>Play the card</p>                         |  <p>Play the card</p>                 | <p>Play one card per round.<br/>Send to the facilitator via the defined channel.<br/>A card played correctly is +1 point.<br/>A card played incorrectly is -1 point.</p> |  |

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#CNX2024

CARDS YOU CAN PLAY



# Community Network Xchange - Asia Pacific (CNX-APAC)

Community Network Xchange (CNX) began in the year 2017 to provide information and know-how of community networks. Over the last seven editions, CNX has addressed various factors related to community networks, including understanding social and economic sustainability, the Internet of the people, promoting public Wi-Fi access, meaningful access, community networks for public goods, and connecting indigenous and mountain communities in its latest edition. Over the years, CNX addressed various factors related to community networks, including understanding social and economic sustainability, the Internet of the people, promoting public Wi-Fi access, meaningful access, community networks for public goods, and connecting indigenous and mountain communities.

Practitioners from various countries such as Bangladesh, South Africa, Argentina, Malaysia, Indonesia, Haiti, Kenya, Nepal, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan participated in past editions to share their expertise.

This year's CNX was the 8th edition of the Community Networks Xchange - Asia Pacific (CNX-APAC) held on 15th and 16th November at T-Hub Hyderabad. The event was hosted by Digital Empowerment Foundation in collaboration with the Government of Telangana, the Internet Society, the APNIC

Foundation, the Association for Progressive Communications, the Centre for Development Policy and Practice and the Global Digital Inclusion Partnership.

The theme for CNX 2024 was "Building Communities for Rights to Access and Access to Right" and addressed network deployment challenges in rural and remote regions as well as focus on the subsequent challenge of exclusion from entitlements. The Xchange aimed at bringing community-led and community-centred access solutions to the forefront so that different stakeholders, including philanthropic organisations, government, policymakers, and grassroots organisations, have a perspective on different models and their utility.



Read the event  
report



Watch the event's  
highlights



Spotlight moments  
captured

# Talking the Walk: Youth, Women, and Unconnected from Rural India



The event, Talking the Walk: Youth, Women, and Unconnected from Rural India, brought together voices of digital change leaders from underserved and underrepresented communities across India. Organised by Digital Empowerment Foundation and the United Nations in India, the forum highlighted grassroots digital transformation efforts and discussed pathways to achieve the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Leaders from various sectors shared insights into inclusive digital empowerment, underscoring the vital roles of women and youth in India's digital revolution.

The Global Digital Compact (GDC), proposed by the UN, promotes a shared digital future through universal connectivity, data protection, inclusion, and human

rights online. Aligned with GDC principles, the event emphasised community-driven digital solutions and inclusive policymaking. An interactive storytelling session featured SoochnaPreneurs, CSOs, and digital experts sharing experiences on tackling digital inequalities, showcasing their commitment to equitable digital access.



Read the report



Listen to the experts from the talk



# Publications on Digital Development



*Resource Mobilization Through Bricolage in Social Enterprises*



*Policy Brief: ICT for Empowering Accessibility/Inclusion: The Impact of Digital Integration on the Lives of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)*



*Dance of Democracy- Digital Narrative of Indian Election*



*Just Transition and Economic Diversification of Jharkhand's Coal Heartland*



*Artists Impressions on Algorithm, AI and Platforms Accountability*



*Imprints of Change: The Digital Journey To Swaraj*



*An Exploratory Study of Adoption and Usage of Technology by Rural Women for Entrepreneurship and Empowerment*



*Connected Resilience: Gendered Experiences of Meaningful Connectivity through a Global Pandemic*




*Stories of Women Protagonism: Fighting the Digital Divide*



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Communities at the Heart of Digital Design

## BECOMING DIGITAL CITIZENS

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## How 'DiDi'- an AI Chatbot is becoming the Tech-Guru for Rural Women

*By Dr. Raina Ghosh, Research and Advocacy Division, Digital Empowerment Foundation*

\*DiDi = DigitalDidi

Published on: March 8, 2025

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## Women's Role in Transforming Digital Education in Rural India



## An Overview of UN Initiatives and Policies on Artificial Intelligence

*By Nandini Parashar, Research Intern, Digital Empowerment Foundation*

Published on: March 10, 2025



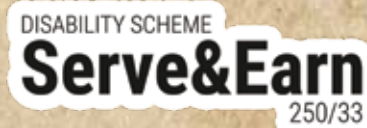
# Join the Movement

For over 23 years, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) has been at the forefront of driving digital inclusion in India's most underserved communities. With a network of 2,000 Community Information Resource Centres (CIRCs) and 10,000 digital foot soldiers, DEF operates across 25 states and 250+ districts, reaching rural, tribal, marginalised, and remote areas.

Through its grassroots-led digital initiatives, DEF has directly impacted the lives of over 35 million people, including those below the poverty line, women, artisans, youth, persons with disabilities, and the elderly – empowering them with access to information, services, and opportunities.

Be part of a movement that's transforming lives and building a digitally inclusive future for all.





To learn more or collaborate, write to us at:

[info@defindia.org](mailto:info@defindia.org)

Let's connect the unconnected — together

# Way Forward

As we move through a time of rapid digital transformation, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) remains dedicated to ensuring technology serves as a bridge, not a barrier. The path ahead presents both challenges and opportunities, demanding deeper engagement, inclusive innovation, and a steadfast commitment to “Defending the Margins.”

In the years to come, DEF will expand its efforts to build resilient digital ecosystems in underserved regions. Our priorities include strengthening last-mile connectivity, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering digital entrepreneurship. By empowering communities with the tools to access information and opportunities, we enable their active participation in the digital economy.

We are also committed to promoting responsible and inclusive technology. As AI and other innovations reshape society, DEF will ensure these advancements remain ethical, transparent, and accessible. Our efforts will protect digital rights, promote data privacy, and amplify the voices of marginalised communities in the digital discourse.

Through initiatives like SoochnaPreneurs and the Digital Swaraj Fellowship, we will continue to nurture local leadership and community-driven digital ecosystems. Beyond providing access, we are creating pathways to economic empowerment, civic participation, and social resilience.

Our vision is clear – to connect the unconnected, empower the underserved, and uphold digital inclusion as a fundamental right. Every connection we establish and every skill we impart takes us closer to a future where technology serves all.

The future is digital, and it must belong to everyone.





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