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OPINION

## **Freedoms for Tomorrow: Enabling Universal Meaningful Access for an Inclusive Nation by 2047**

BY

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*Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is a Delhi-based nonprofit organisation working to help people access a better life through digital literacy and digital tools. With the UNESCO-designated International Day for Digital Learning on March 19, we invited Dr Raina Ghosh and Mr Osama Manzar of DEF to share their views on scaling up digital literacy in a low-resource environment.*

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In 2025, the aspirations of a billion plus Indians seem to have travelled light-years away from those of post-colonial gestating periods of growth. Interestingly, the country's glide towards its 100th year of independence marks a look back at the crucial five-decade period that offered a unique entanglement of digital technology in the everyday lives of its people. It is a testimony to our progress since the Internet in India was launched on August 15, 1995.

Over these years, the nation's course and people's aspirations have rerouted themselves to existential questions in a rapidly digitising nation. Today, India stands at the crossroads of a new definition of inclusivity that seeks liberation from the complex unfreedoms of '(digital) exclusion' and '(information) poverty'. This would mean not only addressing the structural barriers of caste, class, and religion affecting limited educational and economic opportunities

but also fundamentally addressing the digital literacy gaps hindering one's freedom from information darkness. Moreover, we have also understood that in the digital era, literacy entails embracing the entire spectrum of Media and Information Literacy (MIL)—to strategically navigate the threats of an 'infodemic' of digital wrongs and misinformation.

But what does a Digital Bharat look like in its 100th independence year? How do we ensure India@100 is futuristic, technologically competent, and built upon strong equity and inclusivity principles? One of the key tools for embracing inclusivity would be the facilitation of access to digitally mediated information for people through robust digital skilling programs, improving digital infrastructure provisions across the geographies of rural, urban, and physical remoteness. It is to be understood how access to information can open a ripple effect of opportunities towards government and private services, entitlements, social security benefits, new skills, jobs, and the wider integration into the nation's financial economy. This would mean marginalised sections like women, elderly, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), Dalits, Adivasis, other backward groups, and minority populations (religion, gender, and language groups) are granted an invisible weapon to overcome the intergenerational cycles of discrimination and disadvantages.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has envisaged many such flagship initiatives constructively propelling the nation and its massive workforce toward a more inclusive realm of digitalisation—acknowledging the interconnectedness of technology in daily human lives. An inclusive future requires working hand-in-hand and working for the interests of this huge unorganised labour force. Keeping in mind the needs of different underprivileged constituencies of labour in rural areas, the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) partnered with the CII-led India@75 Foundation to jointly design and run the Function Literacy Program (FLiP).

FLiP, a 3-module program, focussed on digital skilling of different labour groups within the rural workforce. The benefits were getting digitally empowered and learning about the functional aspects of digital and financial literacy, as well as moving beyond the mere act of 'going digital' or 'going online.' The program essentially ensured training, access, and digital linkages to government and private services, addressing the issues of the digital divide vis-à-vis the sectors of digital education and the digital financial economy.





For a time when most public services and entitlements have been hinged on digital platforms, the program facilitated access to these welfare avenues for the most vulnerable populations in rural areas through tools like LMS (Learning Management System). This meant inclusivity ushered in by overcoming the various barriers to digital literacy, allowing the lower rung of the population to leverage information, economic independence, and empowerment through informed decision-making.

Therefore, imagining a digitally inclusive nation in 2047 would require many such initiatives like FLiP to enable broader access to technology whereby marginalised communities can advocate for their rights, access essential services, and engage in economic opportunities. However, such imagination essentially rests on the state's role in providing technological infrastructure under a broad umbrella of 'Digital Public Infrastructure' or DPIs. Through targeted educational interventions, community-based digital resource centres, and public-private partnerships, this nurtures a sense of digital readiness among all citizens. Integrating DPIs within state policies, with inclusion as a priority, can usher in more responsive public services, catering to the needs of the digitally underprivileged community members. In other words, the focus must transcend from mere policy-making to making DPIs accessible, affordable, and inclusive — be it in the realms of the right to information, the right to food, the right to health, the right to education, the right to shelter, the right to finance, the right to employment, and so on.

## VOLUNTEERING

# The National Volunteering Week 2025: More than 1,61,000 people act for an equitable tomorrow.



India@100 Foundation — a CII initiative, envisions an inclusively developed India by 2047, embodying collective nation-building efforts. As part of this vision, the India@100 Foundation has been consistently strengthening the volunteering ecosystem by fostering interconnected networks and initiatives that contribute to India's growth and development. The National Volunteering Week (NVW), held from 18–24 January every year, embodies this effort.

The 12th edition of National Volunteering Week (NVW 2025) was held under

the theme, 'Act Today for an Equitable Tomorrow.' This year, like every other, the NVW illustrated the power of collective action and community spirit. More than 1,61,648 volunteers contributed over 8,67,433 hours to help 32.2 million+ people.

Community Development attracted the highest participation with over 122,617 volunteers contributing 663,156.5 hours. Healthcare followed with 17,960 volunteers dedicating 59,998.5 hours. 4,555 participants put in 86,708 volunteer hours to drive Environmental Sustainability initiatives. Education and Rural Education combined engaged over 10,000 volunteers, while Art and Culture, Road Safety, Skill Development, Social Inclusion, and Women Empowerment programs collectively benefited from thousands of volunteer hours nationwide.

The volunteering drive also strengthened the case for industry leading by example in catalysing change. Major business houses organised pan India drives to build the narrative for mainstream volunteering in society.

You can read more about India@100 Foundation's volunteering initiatives [here](#).

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