

Indicator 7

Case study: Digital literacy partnership

How large-scale change and adoption of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) can become a reality when NGOs, charities, government and media organizations collaborate.



Digital Empowerment Foundation

“Media and Information Literacy is a necessity. If you’re not media literate you are disempowered”, says Osama Manzar who’s the founder and director of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) in India. DEF partners with civil society, local media and state government to provide MIL skills to some of the poorest people in the country. One of the ways they are doing that is through a team of 300 women factcheckers.

The women are called ‘information trustees’ and live in villages where understanding of MIL is low. “Many in the community trust WhatsApp more than anybody else because that’s their only source of media information,” says Osama who set up the non-profit organization in Delhi 23 years ago aiming to eradicate information poverty from India.

Putting women at the heart of MIL projects

Research into the work being done by the DEF suggests that people in villages are more likely to go to women rather than men for help¹. “We realized that when the women are at the center, old people come to them, children come to them, other women come to them so the natural inclusion capacity with the women is very high,” he explains.

The ‘information trustees’ are trained to help people understand and identify misinformation, hate speech and reliable sources and ultimately to help them think before sharing or believing what they see, read or hear.

Osama says: “If a woman is literate or a woman is educated, the impact immediately goes to the house. It may not be true with men.”

Role-playing around MIL



Digital Empowerment Foundation

Osama’s team has also created a role-playing toolkit for the ‘information trustees’ to use in villages. For example, one person will act as a fraudster, another acts as factchecker, another acts as a critical thinker. The audience is then sent information and can choose to click on the link or not.

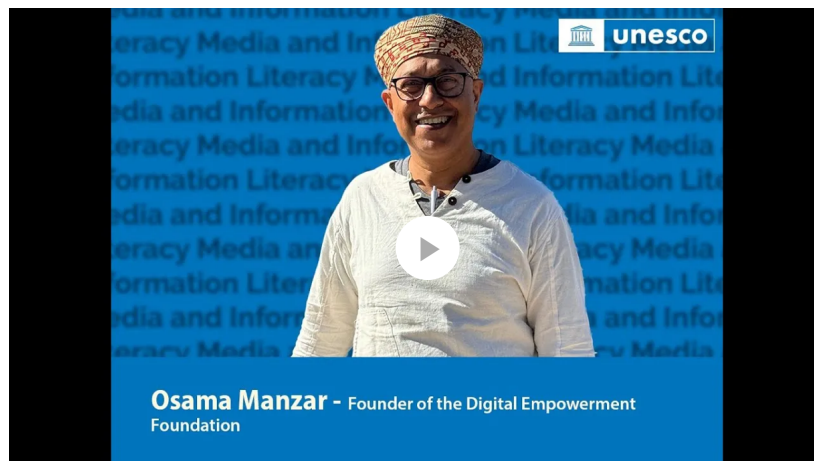
“The critical thinker might say, ‘listen, every time you get information, the first question you ask is do I know the person? Do I have any relation with this information? If you don’t know anything, are you in a position to take a decision? If not, who should you go to? You go to somebody who is an expert’. So, this critical thinking starts coming into their life,” says Osama.

The wider MIL partnership

The Information Trustee project is part of a much wider MIL public education campaign run by DEF which involves civil society groups and local media trying to share best practice and provide information as a service. They have a network of more than 2,000 digital and information entrepreneurs helping communities in rural and isolated places in India become more digitally literate so they can safely access healthcare, education and job opportunities.

Osama says: "It is very important for us to realize that Media and Information Literacy is so important for communities of all classes and more for communities of the lower class, who are somehow maybe the last to get education and empowerment or be educationally enabled or financially enabled. They are the real public. They are the masses."

One indication of the impact and popularity of this work is that 50,000 people subscribe free to one newsletter, designed and curated as a Hindi newspaper called 'Digital Rajasthan', which is distributed as a pdf. It's put together each night by one of the entrepreneurs, Asim Khan, who compiles the stories and issues he encounters and sources that day.



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MIL partnerships: The future

Osama accepts that not all media organizations will have the capacity to provide the kind of work he does which is why partnerships are so important.

April 2025

DEF signs the first memorandum of understanding with the Telangana* State Government to provide widespread Media and Information Literacy training including for state officials.

The plan is to include MIL training in the curriculum for schools in the Telugu language to act as a template for more MIL training in states across India.

Key takeaway: There is power in numbers so if you're a poorly resourced, poorly funded small media organization look in your own country or region for other larger organizations or partnerships providing Media and Information Literacy training that you can be part of.

¹ [The impacting of recruiting women entrepreneurs on reducing mission drift](#) 

*Telangana is a state in southern India

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