Digital Empowerment Foundation

Name of the Project: Digital Literacy-Punjab Phase-1

Reporting Year: 2019-20

Report No.: End Report-2020

Internet Saathi is an initiative to introduce women to digital tools, information and opportunities that the internet holds. Under this project, women volunteers (or Internet Saathis) have been trained in and equipped with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) tools and knowledge to connect remote communities to the mainstream world, thus bringing them out of information darkness. ICTs have accelerated economic growth and propelled a wave of engagements that have touched human lives; changing the way communities interact, increasing opportunities for livelihood and crossing the barriers of inequitable growth. ICTs have also taken up such pre-eminence in our everyday lives, that we now have access to a bank of knowledge and services at our fingertips. As a result, people in tune with ICTs are no longer isolated and are part of the fast-changing global platform. However, there are still millions who are yet to gain access to ICT platforms to access knowledge and opportunities, especially women from rural India. Google and Tata Trust's joint initiative 'Internet Saathi' has empowered thousands of rural women across the country to access digital tools and connect with the online world. As part of this initiative, Google and Tata Trust teamed up with Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) as an implementation partner to reach out to women living in rural parts of Punjab in an effort to train them in digital literacy and further digitally empower more than five lakh women and girls. The project was implemented in seven districts of Punjab and a total of 750 women leaders were given training to spearhead the digital revolution in rural India. This report outlines the outcome and challenges of the project and highlights the success stories of the Internet Saathis, their experiences and learning from the project. Outreach: In the fourth phase we covered 2897 villages in 37 blocks across five districts of Punjab.

Project Overview:

The mission of Internet Saathi was to train rural women (Internet Saathis) to provide digital and internet literacy to lakhs of rural women. These trained Internet Saathis were enabled to train women in functional mobile usage and spread awareness about digital and financial literacy to enhance their ICT skills and expose others like them to digital tools and the internet. The training modules included basic operating functions of mobile phone, digital literacy, and digital financial literacy. The project was rolled out in Punjab to cover five lakh rural women and girls between June-19 to January in 2020. A cadre of 750 Internet Saathis trained a cumulative of **504705** beneficiaries under this project. The beneficiaries ranged from varying backgrounds of caste, economic status, educational qualifications and occupations but most of them were first-time digital users. Every Internet Saathi, equipped with two smart phones each, targeted 3-4 villages.

They travelled for six months from door-to-door to train and impart literacy. The project successfully completed its target and established a strong foundation of women leaders driven to change and contribute to the society.

Outcomes:

The main aim of the project was to create a large-scale impact in the area of women empowerment through access and awareness of digital tools and connectivity among the female population in the targeted areas. The outcome, both quantitative and qualitative, can be witnessed among various stakeholders of the project. The project achieved a target of training total **504705** beneficiaries of the backward communities of rural areas.

SR.No	District	Blocks	Villages	Total Saathis	Responses Expected	Responses Received
1	Hoshiarpur	8	904	242	169400	160379
2	Moga	5	250	63	44100	44098
3	Jalandhar	10	729	190	133000	125382
4	Kapurthala	5	491	124	86800	85467
5	Amritsar	9	523	131	91700	89379
Total		**37**	**2897**	**750**	**525000**	**504705**

Activities and Implementation process: The following are the activities and process that had been done during the implementation of the project.

- **District and Village mapping**

- **Village network identification**

- **Identification and selection of District and Block Coordinator**

- **Organized day long orientation session for Implementation Team (State, District and Block Coordinator)**

- **Selection of interested and potential Internet Saathi (Female) as per village mapping**

- **Conducted two-day training/workshop for selected Internet Saathis**

- **Launch of digital literacy program/ activity in the village by trained Internet Saathis**

- **Bi-Monthly Meeting conducted with Internet Saathis by District and Block Coordinator at block level**

- **Meeting conducted with Implementation Team**

Key Highlights of the Programme:

- Though the primary focus of the project was to impart digital literacy to women and F girls (ages 14 and above) of the backward communities of rural areas.

- One of the key achievements of the project has been the extensive outreach across the villages to mobilize women and young girls to participate in the rural digital revolution. The project was a success in empowering women from marginalized and low-economic and social backgrounds, in areas with low access of digital tools and its awareness.

- Education was not a barrier for this project. It managed to benefit more persons who F were illiterates than those who had a little or higher education. The Internet Saathi project was based on hands-on training under which reading ability was minimized for operating a device. To use the internet, voice commands were prioritized for search over a phone or tablet. However, illiterate beneficiaries took more time to learn to operate a mobile phone or tablet as compared to literate beneficiaries. Yet their operational performances were at par as per information from Internet Saathis or trainers.

- Basic mobile literacy was the first step towards Digital Education. It included the use of offline applications and maneuvering through the basic function of smart phone.

- Internet literacy was one of the key focus areas of the trainings, given its value in accessing and sharing information. It is also one of the main media 'techniques' to access various citizen-centric government applications that provide easy access to government schemes and entitlements to citizens. Since most of the beneficiaries belonged to poor rural areas with limited connectivity, a high number of projects beneficiaries were first-time internet users. Starting this training from the scratch, beneficiaries were first trained to switch on and switch off mobile data on the phone.

- In today's time, digital literacy is incomplete without digital financial literacy. F Therefore, keeping up with the time and its needs, trainings of beneficiaries focused on providing awareness about digital financial tools and accessing banking services through a mobile device. The Saathis were made to watch a video film on online banking and financial literacy for this purpose, besides including them in discussions about the same. The video covered topics like USSD, UPI, mobile wallets and debit/credit cards among others.

Challenges:

The Internet Saathi project was a great opportunity for DEF to interact with thousands of rural women and introduce them to technology on the road towards its mission of providing digital access, connectivity and digital literacy to the marginalized sections of the society. This project also gave DEF a platform to experiment with new ideas and tackle several challenges that came its way.

The challenges were diverse and ranged from technical issues, social issues, cultural issues till geographical barriers. Some of the key challenges from the project were:

✓ Frequent technical defects in the devices provided to the Saathis, especially battery backup of smartphones

✓ Tedious procedures and delays in the servicing of the devices

✓ Poor network connectivity in certain tribal belts

✓ Frequent technical glitches affected the monitoring mechanism

✓ Long distances between villages with poor road transportation and connectivity led to delay in on-field problem resolution

✓ Illiteracy and lack of awareness among the communities created suspicion about the intention of the Internet Saathis and the program

✓ Caste politics often led to demotivation and jealousy among local women and the Internet Saathis

✓ Saathi Honorarium were very less because the Saathis' travel cost and target was high

✓ In the middle of the programme, Panjab witnessed heavy rainfall which led to severe flood, due to which work of Jalandhar and Kapurthala project was paused, children were kidnapped during flood so the village panchayat stopped all the activities of the village.

✓ Panjab is rich state, everyone has a smart phone and affording a phone is not a constraint.

✓ Local people were reluctant to interact with coordinators and Politics had a lot of influence on local people.

✓ Disturbance and interference from media house are another barrier in their work.

Social Impact:

Overall, social impact was brought by this project, it made women self-reliant and increased their status in the society, empowered them to have a say in the family matters, it fostered gender equality between men and women, instils confidence in women and spreads digital literacy and positive outlook. The IS have connected with the FREND project and is aligned for future upcoming programmes, some of the girls are also encouraged to take up further education from Open University to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Impact Story

My name is Manjinder Kaur. I am from Panjurai (Chogavan) village. My saathi number is 497. I have been connected to internet saathi program for 5 months. Under this program, I was given four villages, in which I had to give training to the women of the village how to use of internet and mobile phones.Before joining the program, I had a problem that I did not talk much with people because I feel afraid to talk to new people. Then my Block Coordinator explained about the program that I have to go to the village and train the women of the village. At first I had made up my mind, but my Block Coordinator again explained to me that it would benefit me and after listening to him, I agreed to do this.I started training the women of the village about the use of internet and mobile phones. For the first few days, I felt afraid, but as the time passed, my fear also ended and I started giving training to the girls and women in the village. This brought confidence in me and completed the target and village in time. Along with connecting with internet partner, I improved my tailoring skill with the help of internet and also learned many new designs.I thank the internet Saathi team very much because I got to learn a lot by joining this program and it build my confidence.
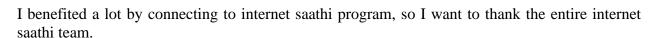
Kuldeep Kaur

My name is Kuldeep Kaur. My village name is Kot Hirde Ram. It has been 5 months since I joined the internet saathi program, I learned a lot in these 5 months and I taught my village girls, women and elderly people to use mobile phones. When I told people about running a mobile phone, I had to face a lot of problems.

While I was trying to get the girls and women of my village to run a mobile phone, one of the villagers tried to make a police case against me for making me wrong. The police came to the house and questioned me, but when the lady police asked me and I gave them complete information about my project (Internet Saathi) and also I told that I am not doing anything wrong, it is a social service is. The lady police heard my words and also spoke with the sarpanch of the village and asked about me, the boy who had tried to tarp me was now completely trapped. The sarpanch also told the boy a lot and warned him. Seeing all this and getting the support of the people, my confidence grew further and I again started training the women of the village to run a mobile phone.

I learned sewing along with running the internet, but by working in this project, I also fulfilled my dreams and through the internet, I learned new tricks of sewing, whose file I have also prepared. Seeing this, my old teacher was also praising me.

I benefited a lot by connecting to internet saathi program, so I want to thank the entire internet saathi team.

Conclusion: **The Internet Saathi project was a major success in terms of its scale and innovation in design. The project successfully achieved a target of over five lakh beneficiaries to include men, women and girls to become 'Digitally Internet, Basic Mobile literate and financially aware'. The community trainings of the five-lakh people in Punjab through digitally empowered rural women was one of the greatest achievements of the project as it exposed the information-dark communities to the power of technology and the internet. At the same time, qualitatively, the project created self-confidence and an entrepreneurial attitude among the Internet Saathis to use technology as a means to enhance their livelihood opportunities while serving the needs of their community members. The project, thus, achieved scale by reaching out to communities of more than 2897 village and depth by creating women digital leaders to drive and lead the rural digital revolution.**

Thank You