10to19
DASRA ADOLESCENTS COLLABORATIVE

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BUFFERING NOW

Harnessing Technology for Sustainable Good: Lessons for Adolescent-Focused Organizations

Table of Contents

Introduction ---- 02

Status, Goals and Vision ---- 05

Recommendations for the integration of Technology into Programs ---- 09

Case Studies ---- 17

Conclusion ---- 18

Introduction

The ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent pandemic-imposed lockdown, followed by the safety precautions taken to execute work on ground have gravely affected public service delivery, across areas of health, education and livelihood, among others, leaving millions of people with no access to their entitlements. The national lockdown, and its aftermath, have also significantly impacted on-ground programs led by the government and civil society organizations.

As a majority of the world went into a lockdown, urban elites saw themselves spending hours on Zoom calls and discovering their love for baking, gardening and self care, while adolescents in rural and remote parts of India struggled to find seamless internet connection to access online resources, let alone online classes. As the urban working population adjusted to working from home, migrant workers and daily wage earners were left stranded on the roads. The Covid-19 crisis highlighted some grim realities of the world, and hit the undo button on years of development.

During the lockdown, as few as 15% of girls in India had access to sanitary pads, since most of them were dependent on schools to access these and the schools were now closed.[1] As many as 10 million girls in India were found to be at risk of dropping out of school because of the COVID-19 pandemic; and it is likely that their parents would never allow them to go back to school again.[2] Over 4 million young Indians lost their jobs due to the impact of the pandemic, and were left struggling for themselves and their families.[3]

Everywhere, people were trying to readjust to living in a lockdown. The unprecedented crisis forced all sectors, to quickly adopt and adapt to technology to respond to the times, given the limits on travel and in-person interaction. And we've seen this shift across institutions. The education sector is turning to online resources and virtual classrooms; the health sector is picking up on telemedicine and IVRS; financial institutions have started to transition to remote services; local grocery stores are opting for cashless transactions; and instant messaging platforms have become the means to mass messaging. All of this, while technology and digital services are still far from being uniformly distributed and accepted, for reasons aplenty. This is a challenge that nonprofit organizations have to navigate too.

In India, there are over 3.2 million non-governmental and voluntary organizations. A majority of these organizations don't even have a website of their own, let alone a digital intervention to support their on-ground work. However, if more and more organizations are able to leverage digital technologies for programming, administrative or financial purposes, there are several advantages that the civil society will be able to benefit from.

At the organization level, if nonprofit organisations set up their own independent websites, they can share their registration certificates, financials and annual reports in a public space, thus creating a conducive space for donors to find them and verify their credentials. This also creates a greater sense of transparency and accountability, which has been a challenge that India has been facing for the last few years due to frequent government crackdowns on the civil society, besides efficiency in rolling out on ground activities. The use of technological tools and software internally can drive greater efficiencies when it comes to program, financial and personnel management.

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[1]https://scroll.in/article/965984/only-15-girls-in-india-had-access-to-sanitary-pads-during-lockdown

[2]https://frontline.thehindu.com/dispatches/10-million-girls-at-risk-of-dropping-out-of-school-because-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-says-rte-forum-policy-brief/article33662229.ece

[3]https://www.bloombergquint.com/economy-finance/41-lakh-youth-lose-jobs-in-india-due-to-covid-19-impact-ilo-adb-report

Once trained in digital content creation, representatives of NGOs can share updates about their activities and progress with a larger audience and be appreciated for their efforts, at the same time, receive feedback and suggestions to do better. An active social media presence can potentially open doors for nonprofits to diversify funding through access to individual donors or a crowdfunding community. This can be especially motivating for grassroots NGOs that operate at very small budgets and have limited access to big and credible funders.

At a programmatic level, by leveraging various digital tools and technologies, nonprofits can gather and visualize primary data faster, monitor and evaluate progress more effectively, disseminate information to masses at scale, support scale up of on ground activities, remotely build capacities of staff and community members, communicate with ground staff and team members in real time, and allow data to reflect progress, and more.

Over the last two decades, many organizations have been able to see the benefits of digital tools and technologies, and integrate it into their programming, leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness in their implementation, and higher digital inclusion among communities. However, there have also been organizations that have not felt the need, or not had the ability and resources to adopt digital tools and have preferred to stick to their traditional ways for various reasons. Until the COVID-19 crisis struck the world.

Once the lockdown was imposed, these organizations were forced to completely put on hold their program on ground or quickly—even haphazardly in some cases—adopt digital tools and technologies without much planning and piloting. This has led to the realisation that those organisations who onboarded the digital bandwagon before the Covid-19 crisis, have had a head start. Sectors like health and education have particularly done better than others like livelihood and gender in adopting and innovating with digital tools and technologies. The others have much to catch up.

Early into the lockdown, Dasra designed the *ResiLens Stress Test* to help non-profits understand where they stand on institutional resilience and impact optimization, in the context of the Covid-19 emergency. Over 200 NGOs of varying budget sizes, spread across multiple sectors took, took this test.

- The test found over 25 nonprofits at high risk of financial and impact shutdown within a year of the lockdown, due to the twin-problem of low impact and weak resilience.
- Another 36% were found at the risk of entering the high-risk zone in the absence of urgent action.
- Three major stress drivers limiting organizational resilience were found to be Financial Health related, Organisational Health related and Impact Optimization Related. The last one included disruption to mission critical/core programs affecting impact.

Dasra curated the *ResiLens Stress Toolkit* to enable non-profit leaders to navigate the on-going crisis, proactively plan for future and re-align with evolving priorities. The purpose of the toolkit was to help non-profit executive teams conduct a data-enabled stress test assessment and allow them to determine risk-adjusted decisions well in advance. The ideas behind this was that such decisions would not only help the nonprofits manage the ongoing crisis but may also place their path of re-invention, and therefore, emerge more resilient from the crisis.

Scan code to access the ResiLens Stress Toolkit

A report titled *Lost in Lockdown*, released by Dasra in 2020, highlights the pandemic's effects on adolescent and youth serving non-profit organizations across the country. The findings of the report show that 19% of nonprofit organisations surveyed were "hardly working" during the pandemic, while 36% others had to restrict their activities to emergency-related only. Only 4.5% of all surveyed nonprofit organisations were implementing their usual programs as before.

Thus, this crisis has highlighted, more than ever before, the need for quality digital infrastructure and technologies to support onground programs in various ways.

The *Lost in Lockdown* report draws on responses to an online survey of 111 organizations, which work with more than 30 lakh young people across the country. The report probes into the various consequences that have been observed among any adolescents or youths and the organizations that service them since the beginning of the lockdown. The findings range across key themes, including access to education, livelihoods, mental health impacts, the experience of violence and early marriage, and access to reproductive and health services as well as the extent of household hunger and loss of livelihoods. It also puts forth key recommendations for civil society organizations to keep in mind as they adapt their programs to account for the "new normal" of post-COVID-19 life.

Scan code to read Lost in Lockdown

Further, there is growing understanding today that access to digital literacy empowers the marginalized to access quality health, education, governance, safety and livelihood opportunities, among others. These, in turn, promise affordable seamless access to the internet and ICT tools, and knowledge to operate them and leverage the bank of information available online.

Now, as more and more organizations, institutions and government bodies begin to introduce technology in their programming for the sector, the 10to19 Dasra Adolescents Collaborative aims to leverage its networks and research capacities to demystify digital interventions and create actionable insights for NGOs, especially those catering to the adolescents' population.

10to19: Dasra Adolescents Collaborative is a high-impact platform that unites funders, technical experts, the government and social organizations to reach five million adolescents, and move the needle on four outcomes key to adolescent empowerment:

Completion of Secondary Education

Delay Age at Marriage

Delay Age at First Pregnancy

Increased Agency

We understand that a lot of rationale and knowledge at large already exists in the sector about leveraging digital interventions, however, the 10to19 Collaborative is committed to shining a light on digital solutions to respond to immediate needs of adolescents in particular and their communities. This report aims to share learnings from the sector and its conversations with sector experts and trailblazing organizations as an effort to provide a wider audience to learn from the former when it comes to integrating digital technologies into their programming. This report is thus targeted for nonprofit organizations in India—particularly those working in the adolescent space but not limited to them—that are thinking of adopting digital tools and technologies in their programming or are in the early stages of their digital interventions. Further, learnings from this report may help the sector at large make necessary pivots to longer term plans and strategies around digital interventions to ensure that adolescents, and other marginalised communities, continue to thrive with dignity and equity as we prepare for a life in a post-COVID world across the country.

Status, Goals and Vision

The COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdown have had serious consequences for India's adolescents and youth and have gravely affected public service delivery, across areas of health, education and livelihood, among others, leaving millions of people with no access to their entitlements. The promise of affordable, seamless access to the internet and ICT tools, and knowledge to operate them and leverage the bank of information available online, therefore, can play a transformative role in enabling young people to navigate an unprecedented situation. While the incorporation of digital tools and technology into civil society interventions has been slow, the need for this shift is evident, now more than ever.

On September 18, 2020, Dasra hosted a virtual consultation with 14 participating organizations with the idea to bring together early adopters of technology and sector experts to understand India's digital eco-system, highlight best practices and learnings from organizations in the sector, and offer recommendations and priorities for the effective implementation of digital tools and technologies moving forward. Some of the learnings from this engagement have been shared here.

Goals and Gaps in India's Digital Ecosystem across Key Sectoral Pillars

Key Pillars	Goals	Gaps & Current Status
 Policy & Regulations	To provide affordable internet access as an essential service to all	• Uneven distribution of digital infrastructure in urban & rural India • Slow and ineffective implementation of Bharat Net • Lack of policy to protect data and privacy • Lack of holistic curriculum and pedagogy for digital literacy
 Infrastructure & Programs	To make flexible, user-centric programs accessible across geographies, genders, socio-economic and literacy levels	• Slow adoption of technology by organisations for programs • Digital tools are considered a goal, rather means to an end • Limited access to digital tools among beneficiaries • Lack of innovative ideas across areas of development sector
 Donors & Funding Landscape	To fund innovative digital solutions, proliferation of infrastructure and availability of digital tools	• Lack of funds for building infrastructure & distributing digital tools • Lack of funds for staff capacity building to handle technology • Insufficient collaborative funding to further adoption of digital tools
 Culture & Community	To adopt and adapt to socially inclusive technology and integrate it into everyday life	• Access to technology is heavily gendered and often unaffordable • Limited understanding of contextual digital literacy & online safety • Very few role models and lack of positive messaging to showcase the role of technology in building agency

Even as there is growing realization of the need to adopt digital tools and technologies, and their role in empowering lives, access to mobile phones continues to be skewed in India, with a majority of the country's cell phone users being men. This is both a cultural as well as a financial barrier. The irregular and gendered distribution of technology across the country and the strict regulation of young women's usage of technology has direct consequences on their inability to engage with and participate in empowerment programs, attend school virtually, gain digital literacy, and build essential skills and knowledge to enable them to enter the job market moving forward. This is not all. There are also the barriers of inadequate funding for innovation and sustainable digital solutions, limited understanding of contextual digital literacy and online safety, followed by misplaced understanding of digital tools as a goal rather than a means to an end. These are challenges that nonprofit organizations have to navigate more frequently than they would want to.

According to the *Connected Women: The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020* by GSMA, 79% of men in India own a mobile phone* versus 63% females, with a gender gap*** of 20%. When it comes to mobile Internet usage**, 42% of men in the country have this access versus 21% of women, with a gender gap of 50%. This has only become worse since the lockdown.

Dasra's own data, too, reflects this. A rapid assessment carried out by Dasra in 2020 through its partners in two states found:

- In Assam, as many as 82 out of 108 adolescent boys surveyed (75.9%) had access to the Internet on a mobile phone or a computer every day as compared to only 27 out of 94 adolescent girls surveyed (28.7%). On the other side, 43 out of the total 202 adolescents surveyed had no access to the Internet at all. As many as 83.7% of them were adolescent girls in Assam.

- In Chhattisgarh, the digital divide was far less. as many as 102 out of 115 adolescent boys surveyed (88.7%) had access to the Internet on a mobile phone or a computer every day as compared to 70 out of 108 adolescent girls surveyed (64.8%). However, 4 out of the total 223 adolescents surveyed had no access to the Internet at all. Three of them were girls.

*A mobile owner is defined as a person who has sole or main use of a SIM Card, and uses it at least once a month. **Mobile internet users do not have to personally own a mobile phone. ***The gender gap in mobile ownership and mobile internet use refers to how much less likely a woman is to own a mobile (or use mobile internet) than a man.

However, to enable nonprofits to think of technology at scale when integrating into programs, the other stakeholders, too, need to come forward and support. While the government needs to prioritize and speed up availability of digital infrastructure through traditional or alternate solutions to connectivity, it can also look at building more partnerships with nonprofits to scale up successful models. Funders need to invest in bridging the digital gap, as well as supporting the development of innovative solution and their roll out in a sustainable manner. In a conducive environment and with the support of key stakeholders, the nonprofits can find sustainable and accessible digital solutions to not only drive their organization towards its vision and mission, but also the country towards achieving its sustainable development goals.

Recommendations for the Key Stakeholders

Key Stakeholders	Recommendations
 Policy & Regulations	• Prioritize the availability of infrastructure in rural areas by ensuring effectiveness and efficiency of Bharat Net • Find innovative and alternate solutions to connectivity (Local Wi-Fi Hubs, Subsidized Data, Community Networks) • Provide digital tools, training and localised content to frontline workers to carry out their responsibilities • Build partnerships with non profits to scale up successful models
 Infrastructure & Programs	• Engage with government and other stakeholders to make technology more accessible • Think about technology at scale when integrating it into programs • Focus on behaviour change to reset community perceptions of mobile phones as tools rather than entertainment • Provide digital tools, training and localised content to ground staff to carry out their responsibilities
 Donors & Funding Landscape	• Look beyond the immediate results to focus more on long-term sustainable digital solutions • Support transformation of traditional programs to more innovative, unconventional digital models • Support capacity building of human resource to access and leverage technology • Invest to bridge the rural and urban digital divide through alternate and innovative solutions to connectivity
 Culture & Community	• Private Players: Identify non-linear entry points to integrate technology into programs and services on ground • Schools: Create strategic, multilingual digital content, curriculum, and pedagogy for independent learning • Internet Service Providers — Enter the conversation as a key stakeholder for the proliferation of Internet and open to alternate ways of community networks • Community — Be open to understanding, adopting and adapting to digital tools for empowerment

It is only when the digital ecosystem, encompassing all its stakeholders, becomes a conducive environment that India's nonprofits will truly be able to leverage digital tools and technologies at scale to empower the millions of India that are living in marginalization.

Recommendations for the integration of technology into programs

As the previous chapter highlighted, the versatility of technology has meant that it is a critical tool underlying the success of many trailblazing programs across India's development sector. There has traditionally been a lack of clear knowledge as to how organizations have leveraged digital tools to achieve scale and tackle issues at the grassroots. The consultation made evident that many organizations had chosen to use technology in diverse and creative ways and to address a range of social and developmental issues. Drawing on these recommendations made by organizations who have successfully adopted technology or designed interventions around technology early on, it became evident that there was a need to document, codify and distribute knowledge from those who have already succeeded in implementing digital interventions.

One of the most critical takeaways from speaking to organizations has been the importance of adopting a technology-friendly lens while designing programs. Interview respondents commonly cited that while making the transition to digital programs, the use of technology is often an afterthought. Therefore, the need for a more intentional approach to technology, addressing the "why" is the first step to successfully incorporating digital interventions into programs. This intentionality, of course, plays out differently across the life cycle of each individual program, drawing largely on its aims and objectives, its target demographics, and the ways in which the program leverages technology for implementation.

There are **several key best practices** that have emerged from this research, that provide insight into the way leading organizations in India have approached the use of technology in their programs, both during design and throughout the implementation process. Some of these recommendations are captured below:

Identify the relevance of digital tools for problem solving in a community

An important consideration for organizations to make before they embark on the journey to use ICT in their programs is the relevance of digital components to their organizational work, needs and capacities. Organizations need to assess their priorities, reach, human resource capacities and the needs of the community to understand the relevance of a specific digital intervention to their work.

> **"The first [step] is to assess the needs correctly to understand whether the solution requires digital intervention. We don't believe that every intervention requires a digital component. However, wherever technology can solve a problem, it should be integrated."**
>
> **-Piramal Swasthya**

There is a need for rigorous research in order to identify the most strategic use of digital tools. Studying the **geography of implementation** and the **socio-cultural perceptions** of technology can have significant implications on the program's efficacy, and enable organizations to determine whether **existing solutions can be leveraged for the problem**. One organization, NEEDS, based in Jharkhand, stated that limited levels of digital access and skills among low-income women, especially, posed a significant challenge in enabling their transition to digital tools. The use of a mobile phone, often gendered in a country like India, may serve to further distance women from the intervention, rather than promoting accessibility.

Using both a landscape analysis as well as learnings from the sector to gauge whether technology is the most effective tool can also ensure that organizations are designing for effective program adoption. While doing so, BBC Action Media also found that there was a high-level of SIM card turnover per person, making tracking and maintaining a database for each community a challenge. Using this information, therefore, can better enable organizations to evaluate the role of digital tools within their organizations, rather than on the basis of each individual program. Assessing organizational capacities and planning for interventions based on learnings from the ecosystem can enable organizations to anticipate challenges and build contingencies into the program.

Robust sector landscaping and research into the existing interventions can help organizations leverage content and technology that has already been created by exploring the possibility of licensing these components or requesting pro-bono/paid usage with permissions.

Furthermore, the use of a research-first approach can also allow for more intuitive program designs. Insights from Jhpiego's work on their healthcare program NISHTHA, found that using a problem statement and a bottom-up approach, rather than diving into the design process answer-first, allowed for more structured and relevant program design.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself about Relevance and Research:

- Who are we trying to reach?
- What results do we want from the digital intervention?
- Is our method of outreach accessible to the people we are trying to reach?
- Is the solution relevant to our current programming and organizational capacities?

Engage with the local community

Identifying and working with community gatekeepers can lay a strong foundation for the implementation of a technology-reliant program. Programs such as Piramal Swasthya's AMRIT and Gram Vaani's Mobile Vaani, have relied heavily on community networks and key stakeholders to create buy-in for the respective programs. When Mobile Vaani was designed and piloted, it was first tested with community volunteers, who were able to share their insights on functionalities and modifications. Organizations such as Gram Vaani have also sought to move beyond text – using videos, audio and images – to overcome barriers to literacy on the ground. These approaches have been echoed by several organizations – particularly when working with vulnerable communities such as adolescent girls. Addressing biases or apprehensions in the usage of technology early on in program design has been essential to the sustainability and scalability of the program.

Co-creation and knowledge building with low-literate, low-income communities as well as grassroots partners helped BBC Media Action ensure that their innovation had a user-centric design and was accessible. Identifying the low penetration of smartphones, especially among women, in their target communities, helped them decide that IVRS would be most effective to achieve scale for their interventions such as Mobile Academy and Kilkari. Developing an understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of mobile phone usage in communities beyond the inflated statistics of total mobile users in the country can be made possible through engagement with local communities.

Additionally, working with the community to build champions for digital tools can enable easy uptake within the community.

Taking a bottom-up approach has proved critical in establishing key partnerships with community stakeholders, particularly to establish a baseline and to leverage existing information to inform program design. Digital Green, an organisation, used this approach to ensure not only that their program was accessible and relevant to local farmers, but also that their intervention was continually dynamic, evolving as per local requirements. Organizations like NEEDS have solved for disparate access to technology by increasing individual and community access to hardware by encouraging families to allow girls two hour of independent phone usage. Restless Development, another organization, that works primarily in rural areas, has utilized public spaces where, in partnership with the the local panchayat or a school, they have created a physical resource space where people can interface with devices such as tablets or laptops to solve for digital literacy in the absence of access to personal devices.

As continued barriers to access technology and limited availability of hardware continue to pose significant challenges to program delivery, organizations need to ensure that increased access to hardware goes hand in hand with technological innovations to ensure that those without access do not get left behind.

> **"We should not create a further digital divide. Just because students don't have devices, they shouldn't be left out of quality education. Donors have a role here. There is no dearth of content what needs investment is technological innovation and hardware"**
>
> **-NEEDS**

As the program continues to evolve, so does the role of digital tools. Ensuring that the program is designed to remain dynamic and scalable through the program's life cycle can play a role in ensuring that the program continues to remain relevant and efficient. With this in mind, some best practices include:

Key Questions to Ask Yourself about Target Demographics and Geographies:

- What languages do we need to design in?
- Who are the key community gatekeepers that should be involved?
- What is the level of literacy of the people we're looking to reach?
- Are there any security and privacy concerns for our demographic audience?

Creating space for human element

Many programs continue to rely on inter-personal mediation and last-mile volunteer/ground staff contact to solve for skewed and disparate access to technology, cultural and social stigma, and the gendered nature of this access. Interventions such as ARMMAN's mMitra and Dimagi's CommCare program rely on human mediation to ensure that the program is delivered at the last mile. Both these programs rely on the frontline workers (FLWs) to deliver the program to members of the community, using the respective mobile application to convey relevant health information or to collect and collate on-ground data. Ranging from frontline workers to program staff working on the ground, organiza-tions have emphasized the need for continued human presence in ensuring delivery of technology-based interventions at the last mile.

This can also vary based on the kinds of issues the program is tackling. Sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health, maternal health and gender-based violence are often challenging to tackle through digital tools alone. There are also the concerns of private information and photographs being shared or misused. Having the support of frontline workers, such as ASHAs and Anganwadi workers, in order to address the softer aspects of program delivery around taboo topics, and being able to cre-ate a human element to technology can often ensure that the programs are better received, and can be adequately modified as required. When rolling out a digital literacy programme in several con-servative parts of rural India, New-Delhi based organisation Digital Empowerment Foundation ensures there is a female trainer to lead classes for adolescent boys and girls to ensure parents send their daughters to the learning centre. Community mobilisation, conversations with community gatekeepers and engagement with local public institutions (such as panchayats, community health centres, schools) thus can also go a long way in navigating challenges in a community, establishing trust with its gate-keepers, and receiving acceptance from the people.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself about Delivery and Feedback:

- How much human support does the program need at the last-mile?
- How does the program sustain itself?
- How is feedback being gathered and incorporated into the program?

Ensuring that design, user interface and content are accessible and consumable

Creating user-informed content and design can result in faster assimilation of a digital tool into every-day life. Nonprofit organization Breakthrough, for example, has taken the approach of modifying and leveraging information that already exists, ensuring that it is made easy to understand. Other organizations rely on local people to be their primary source of information, ensuring that the content in their tools remains locally and contextually relevant. This is especially critical, as India's linguistic and cultural diversity pose a unique challenge, requiring organizations to build, modify and contextualize contents across geographical areas. Organizations such as Feminism In India have attempted to solve for linguistic diversity by making content available in more languages. However, challenges such as team size, human resource capacities and access to funding continue to present barriers to more inclusive content. Low literacy rates, poor connectivity and limited mobile penetration are critical challenges that play into not only the creation and design of a program, but also how it evolves. MISSING, an organization that has used mobile games to build empathy for victims of sex-trafficking, has translated the MISSING Game into 12 languages to increase its reach. Additionally, programs such as Dimagi's CommCare and Breakthrough's communication campaigns have pushed to make sure that content is available in local languages as well as in diverse formats – that is, beyond text-only content – can allow for information to filter to a wider audience, and promote inclusivity for those who may not be able to read, those without smartphones, or persons with disabilities.

All of these are IVR services because if you are trying to do anything at scale in North Indian states where you are targeting low-literacy, low-income people, IVR is the only solution because of low smart phone penetration. Specially if you are targeting women.

-BBC Media Action

Organizations may also push for accessibility by leveraging existing systems and frameworks, that lead to and promote long-term program sustainability and evolution. The Digital Empowerment Foundation has prioritized developing programs that leverage community-based open spaces for large delivery of services and skills, rather than targeting individuals. The underlying approach states that community and mass focused programs are more effective, cost less and are more accessible to community members across the village. Adopting this lens has therefore ensured that the program is able to navigate the existing systems, as well as ensuring the information is relevant and useful to the communities' everyday lives.

Prioritizing data security and privacy

The gendered dynamics of household phone usage in India have significant implications for data protection and privacy of end user data. The negative connotations of having mobile phones and their perceived impact on young women means that access to tools and knowledge on sensitive issues is often limited for young women and girls. In cases where they are able to engage with these resources, protecting their privacy can be critical to ensuring their safety and wellbeing, as well as retaining con-tinued access to mobile phones and the internet. Organizations like Digital Green, BBC Media Action and CommCare have prioritized the creation and implementation of innovative methods to mitigate the risks associated with collecting and working with sensitive information around these issues such as the use of IVRS-based interventions. For organizations like Breakthrough that often work with young people or minors, who remain particularly vulnerable to harm, understanding data and privacy concerns with special attention to legal compliance and policies are important considerations during the implementation of technology-based interventions.
Besides legal compliances, there is also the personal responsibility of an organisations towards the people it has collected its data from. Given the absence of a data protection law in India, the lines are blurry, awareness is little and effective measures in place to safeguard collected information very few.

When you are developing a digital intervention, you need to consider keep in mind what legal policies or issues to consider. One of the most significant challenges most small, grassroots organisations face when they are trying to launch and scale digital programs is that they don't necessarily have a background in regulatory and legal issues. They don't know about data protection and privacy, taking informed consent or storing and using sensitive personal data.

-BBC Action Media

Creating a feedback loop

Piloting and testing are critical to program success and scalability. Throughout the various stages of introducing and implementing digital interventions, pioneering organizations such as ARMMAN have made it a point to conduct continual dipsticks on the ground, to ensure that they are receiving feed-back around the efficacy of the program on the ground. Gram Vaani is another example of this approach. Given that community participation and engagement is a critical element of the program, the team has created a system through which community members may share feedback around content and the functionality of the IVRS system, thereby ensuring that there are processes in place to receive continuous feedback from the community.

Keeping sustainability and scale at the core of program design

Sustainability and scalability of digital interventions should be considered at the start of the program. Organizations like Jhiepgo that have prioritized low cost, sustainable solution and planned for scale from the beginning, have seen success in handing over programmes to the government. While design, testing and piloting are crucial to program success, without an understanding of operations at scale and the costs involved in scaling up a digital intervention, the sustainability of the programme cannot be assured. BBC Media Action emphasizes the role of strong partnerships and collaboration with the government from the very beginning of programme. Digital Empowerment Foundations often creates a pool of village-level entrepreneurs to eliminate dependence on the organisation beyond the project period. Organizations thus must start to think of a sustainability strategy right from the beginning and not towards the end of a programme or grant period.

"Most programs are not really looking towards making themselves sustainable or entrepreneurial. This is proven by the fact that soon after the grant period, programs usually fall apart and there is no one taking forward what the implmenting organization had started."

-Digital Empowerment Foundation

Challenges

There are myriad challenges that can impact the implementation of a digital-based program, ranging from access to technology and infrastructure to funding and social challenges. Some of the key challenges that organizations we spoke to faced during their implementations are shared here.

1. Low levels of digital access and digital literacy among low literate, low-income women makes it challenging to implement digital programs

2. High levels of SIM churn in rural communities makes it exceedingly challenging to maintain up to date database of mobile numbers of end users.

3. While the use of mobile technology has advantages in terms of speed and scale, infrastructural and network-related challenges continue to hinder the medium's reach.

4. Procuring funding for technology-based programs from traditional funding sources places significant limitations on organizations.

5. India's linguistic and cultural diversity presents a unique challenge in replicating efforts simultaneously across geographies.

6. Human resource capacity and funding are critical to ensure that ground staff and volunteers are comfortable using the technology.

Identifying and solutioning for the diverse needs of a vast population like India's comes with a wide variety of challenges that the country's development sector is now uniquely poised to take on. With this in mind, it is essential to remember that there is no one-size-fits-all for digital solutions. Digital interventions are as diverse as they are innovative, and rely largely on the support of the people they are meant to empower. When beginning or transitioning towards adopting digital tools, it is important to adopt a digital lens to identify the many ways in which technology can enhance or support program and service delivery.

Key Points to Remember

Drawing on learnings from our conversations with these partners, several key recommendations have emerged. These may vary across programmatic and geographic areas, but are broad guidelines that may enable more seamless creation or transition into programs with digital interventions. Some of these recommendations include:

1. Identify the skills and human resources required to develop and run digital tools
2. Prioritize program sustainability and scalability during the early stages of design and development
3. Understand and leverage existing infrastructure and programs wherever possible through research and landscape analysis
4. Build strong partnerships to ensure scale and sustainability
5. Push for more non-traditional, collaborative funding opportunities for technology-based programs
6. Drive transparency with funders, creating space to discuss the potential risks and benefits of a digital program
7. Push for more holistic/infrastructural funding rather than for program-specific technological elements
8. Ensure that ease of use and familiarity of technology is thought through during the design phase. A digital program shouldn't be a burden for the primary users such as front-Line workers
9. Invest in reiterative piloting and testing during the early stages of design and create feedback loops for continuous feedback from end users

The shift towards digital tools and interventions has taken India's development sector by storm, and it is heartening to see sustained and strategic efforts towards more accessible and versatile digital tools come to life. While it is important to note that there are no blanket solution to the various critical challenges that come with embracing technology in development programming, it is important to note that there is significant room to leverage newer, more creative solutions to age-old problems. Documenting these learnings, therefore, is an important first step in pushing for more open conversation and collaborative effort in the space of digital interventions in India.

Case Studies

In this section, the report showcases learning and insights from organisations that we spoke to through the course of this exploration. Through these case studies, we hope to offer vignettes into the diverse digital tools and interventions that organizations have deployed, document the challenges they have faced in, and call attention to the manner in which they have deployed technological tools and platforms and used digital innovations to strengthen their program and improve their reach.

These organisations were identified basis a sector landscaping exercise and through our conversations with leading experts in the field. Following this, a set of criteria were used to shortlist 10 organisations to speak with, and to understand the intent and approach to technology that these trailblazing organiza-tions in the sector had taken. The listed criteria was used as a rubric through which to categorize and understand the nature of these interventions, rather than to rank or evaluate them in comparison to one another. The most critical of these parameters hinged around accessibility (particularly in the context of low literacy and poor infrastructure), the potential to scale, the scope for replicability, cost effectiveness of its implementation, and ease of use of the solution. This, combined with infrastructural dependency and overall accessibility to the end-user allowed the team to better shortlist and identify organizations in the sector to interview.

This is not to say that this is an exhaustive list of the various kinds of tools, platforms and innovations that have been deployed in the sector. Rather, through these case studies we hope to simply offer examples of the myriad roadblocks and solutions, allowing for peer-to-peer cross-learning and illustrative roadmaps. To this end, the case studies have been designed to enable the reader to understand the nature of these interventions, and not to offer a ranking or an evaluation of them in comparison to one another.

For a reader, this section should serve as an introduction to the manner in which organisations are able to leverage ICT and its many resources in real time and in the field, to both strengthen their programming as well as respond to emerging needs at scale, across sectors and geographies.

FCRA ✓ 80G ✓

ARMMAN

Leveraging mobile health platforms to address maternal and child mortality

● HEADQUARTERS: MUMBAI ● YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2008 ● WEBSITE: WWW.ARMMAN.ORG ● NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: ARMMAN leverages technology to create scalable solutions, that empower mothers to raise healthy children. They are committed to improving the well-being of pregnant women, mothers and children in the first five years of their life. The organization uses technology to enable healthy pregnancy, safe delivery, and safe childhood by addressing systemic gaps in healthcare, promoting healthcare-seeking practices by the community and creating evidence-based, cost-effective, scalable solutions.

Intervention in Spotlight: mMitra

PROJECT PERIOD

2013-2020 (ONGOING)

GRANT SIZE

USD 11,28,400 (APPROX.)

PRIMARY FUNDER

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

The Problem

Four women die every hour in India from complications arising during childbirth. India also has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world, with 1.4 million children dying before reaching their fifth birthday. These alarming maternal and child morbidity and mortality numbers are a result of pervasive systemic problems, including lack of access to critical preventive healthcare information and services.

Organization's Response

When the mobile phone arrived and spread across India, ARMMAN realised that mobile technology could be used to create scalable, cost-effective, easy-to-use, yet resource-light solutions. The magnitude of the problem made it apparent that a solution had to be designed to work with existing health infrastructure. ARMMAN won the UK DFID's Global Poverty Action (GPAF) grant, which led to the pilot of the mMitra program in rural Maharashtra. Later in 2013, Glenmark supported the launch of the urban mMitra programme in Sion Hospital, Mumbai. Subsequently, in 2014, Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action (MAMA) has partnered with ARMMAN to scale up mMitra across India.

Model of Intervention

mMitra is a free voice call service that sends critical, timed, and targeted information directly to the mobile phones of women during pregnancy and infancy, through voice messages. These messages can be received in Hindi, Marathi, Kannada and Gujarati. In areas with poor tele-connectivity and weak mobile penetration, mMitra calls are encoded on mobile devices provided to female health workers (Sakhis) who play calls back during home visits.

What the Intervention Has Achieved

The program is unique in leveraging the 'tech plus touch' model,'. By working with the existing frontline health worker network of the government and partner NGOs and combining it with the ubiquity of mobile phones to achieve scale cost-effectively. It is one of only 5 scaled maternal messaging programs across the world. The messages developed by ARMMAN have been validated by The Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecological Society of India (FOGSI) and National Neonatology Forum (NNF).

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Healthcare

Lives Impacted

2,300,000 individuals

Future Priorities

- Leverage ARMMAN's interventions to reach and children and train 1 million health workers (ASHAs) across India by 2025
- To develop more targeted programming by innovating in areas such as predictive analytics and artificial intelligence. Pilots for these innovations are being implemented through a partnership with Google AI for Social Good and IIT, Chennai.

Challenges

Due to the mobile health being a nascent filed, ARMMAN faced a lack of existing research, best practices and benchmarks on mHealth when they began. As a result, the organization is working on creating and validating monitoring indicators along with research on impact and outcomes from the ground up.

Learnings

- The rigorous process of enrolment and data validation not only improves data quality, but also enables women to take voluntary and informed decisions to subscribe to the service. The partnership model in mMitra strengthens field programs even as it improves subscriber engagement.
- As a tech-enabled program, it is critical to keep pace with rapid technology advancements through innovations.

Contact address: swati@armman.org and kruti@armman.org

BBC Media Action

Building the capacity of frontline health workers through simple phone calls

- HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 1999
- WEBSITE: WWW.BBC.CO.UK/MEDIAACTION/WHERE-WE-WORK/ASIA/INDIA
- NATURE: FOREIGN COMPANY (BBC MEDIA ACTION (INDIA) LTD IS A BRANCH OFFICE OF A CHARITY REGISTERED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM)

Brief history of the organization: BBC Media Action is the BBC's international charity — it believes in media and communication for good. BBC Media Action reaches more than 100 million people each year in some of the world's poorest and most fragile countries. Its projects and programs save lives, protect livelihoods, counter misinformation, challenge prejudice and build democracy. Its portfolio in India addresses gender equity, health, sanitation and decent work with innovative, creative programming.

Intervention in Spotlight: Mobile Academy

PROJECT PERIOD

2011-2019

GRANT SIZE

MULTIPLE SOURCES OVER THE LAST EIGHT YEARS

PRIMARY FUNDER

THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

The Problem

Frontline Health Workers (FLWs) are key to improving reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health in rural India. They are often the only source of information for poor women with low literacy levels. However, FLWs are usually women from the community and often poorly educated. They need more training and tools to carry out their jobs more effectively; but they have limited time to build their skills. Distances from centers of learning, lack of financial means to travel and family obligations also prevent them from accessing formal training.

Organization's Response

BBC Media Action, in collaboration with the local government and with support from the Gates Foundation, first launched Mobile Academy in Bihar in 2012 to help FLWs overcome some of these constraints. Mobile Academy is a mobile-based training course designed to refresh FLWs' knowledge of lifesaving reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH) behaviors, and to improve their interpersonal communication skills. It provides free, flexible, anytime, anywhere distance learning to FLWs through their mobile phones.

Model of Intervention

Mobile Academy uses IVR technology that is accessible via a simple voice call. The mobile tool aims to refresh FLWs' knowledge of life-saving preventative health behaviors. Narrated by a sympathetic fictional character with a voice of authority named Dr Anita, the Mobile Academy curriculum covers 33 months; from pregnancy until the child is two years old. Divided into chapters, lessons and quizzes, it uses bookmarking technology that enables FLWs to return to the course where they left off. At the end of the course, FLWs' receive a cumulative pass/fail score. All those who pass, receive a certificate from the Government of India.

What the Intervention Has Achieved

What started as a pilot in Bihar in 2012, was then scaled to Odisha and Uttar Pradesh in 2013 and 2014 and adopted by the national government in 2015/ A national version of Mobile Academy was scaled to 13 states between 2016 to 2019. By March 2019, Mobile Academy was the largest mobile-based training programme for FLWs in the world, with over 300,000 FLWs starting the course and over 200,000 alumni ASHAs across 13 states.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Health

Lives Reached

3,00,000
FLWs trained

2,00,000
graduated

Future Priorities

To leverage the established software application suite to support other thematic areas such as supporting the Swachh Bharat Mission and SHG mobile-based trainings.

Challenges

- Low levels of digital access and skill among low literate, low-income women - including ASHAs and SHG members - present a significant challenge to digital interventions for these target groups.
- High levels of SIM churn in rural communities — i.e. up to 40% or more in six months as per a RCT conducted by Johns Hopkins in Madhya Pradesh in 2018-2019 and as per multiple rounds of annual household surveys by CARE in Bihar — make it exceedingly challenging to maintain an up to date database of mobile numbers.

Learnings

- **User Centred Design**: Rigorous research and co-creation with low literate, low income communities, grassroot partners and the government ensure that our innovations are accessible, impactful, scalable and sustainable
- **Continuous Learning and Data Driven Management**: We analyze system generated data and partner with leading research institutions to monitor reach and engagement, optimize and course correct, support responsive programme implementation and evaluate the impact of our interventions
- **Partnerships for Scale**: We work with state and national government, civil society and the commercial technology sectors to create scalable, sustainable solutions
- **Build on learning**: Lessons learned inform project development and are built into future projects.
- **Information Dissemination**: Policy and research reports/briefings are published to share our findings.

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FCRA ✓ 80G ✓ 12A ✓

Breakthrough

Initiating narrative change for social issues through social media campaigns

- HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 1999
- WEBSITE: WWW.INBREAKTHROUGH.ORG
- NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Breakthrough India is an organisation that works towards making violence against women and girls unacceptable. It uses the power of art, media, pop culture and community mobilization to inspire people to take bold actions to build a world in which all people live with dignity, equality, and justice. Breakthrough's multimedia campaigns bring human rights issues into mainstream conversations and make them relevant to individuals and communities worldwide. These, along with their in-depth trainings for young people, government officials and community groups, push for the generation of leaders sparking social change.

Intervention in Spotlight

#StandWithMe - Be My Safe Space

PROJECT PERIOD

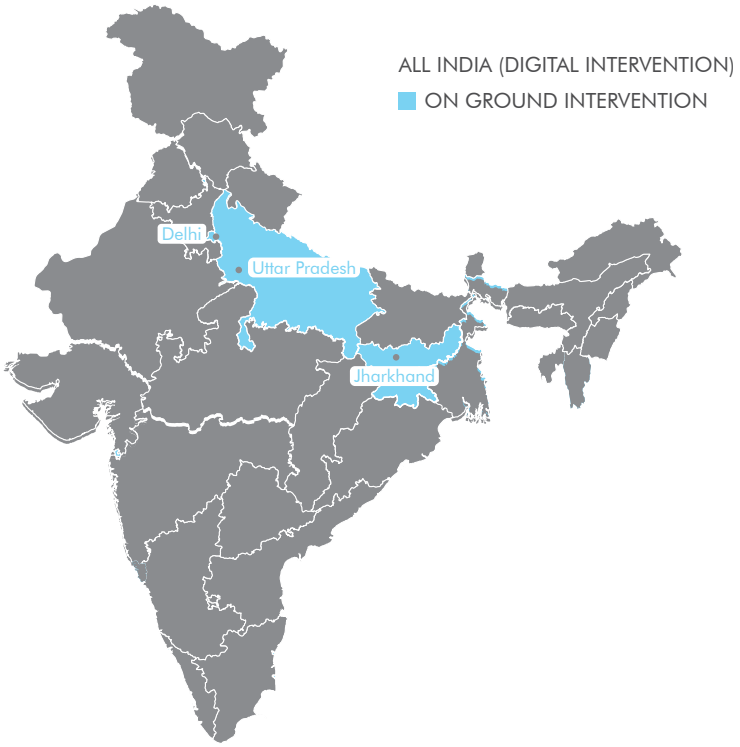
2016-2018

GRANT SIZE

INR 70,00,000

PRIMARY FUNDER

UNTF, GOOGLE, PACKARD FOUNDATION, IKEA FOUNDATION AND TWITTER



The Problem

The issue of sexual harassment hits home for most Indian women, with 92% of women in India having faced sexual harassment at some point in their lives. While laws can help, as can safer streets and homes, the true battle lies in changing people's mindsets towards sexual harassment. This includes engaging not just the women into the conversation, but also children, parents, teachers, friends, lovers and people.

Organization's Response

In an effort to address the high instances of sexual harassment against women, Breakthrough realized the need to have well-informed, guided and holistic conversations around the topic. The #StandWithMe campaign was launched in 2016 to emphasize the need for creating gender inclusive safer spaces, both online and offline, where people could speak without being judged and, subsequently, to make room for real solutions to emerge. Conversations initiated through this campaign are aimed at encouraging people to stand in support with someone facing harassment and understand what it's like to be in their shoes.

Model of Intervention

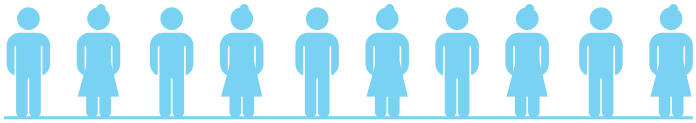
The campaign called upon people across age groups to create gender-inclusive safe spaces, both on social media platforms and in their communities, aimed at reducing instances of sexual harassment. The hashtag #StandWithMe and the tagline 'Be My Safe Space' emphasized the idea of 'Safe Spaces' beyond just the physical concept – a space marked with empathy, kindness, and no judgement. Furthermore, the campaign addressed consent, safety, segregation, stigma and an intergenerational dialogue to move towards the creation of safer gender-inclusive spaces. The online campaigns were supported by offline activities and digital media trainings in smaller cities.

What the Intervention Has Achieved

Following this campaign, the issue of online safety came up very strongly in Breakthrough's work, so did conversations around relevant laws and their impact on adolescent mental health. This led Breakthrough to re-launch #StandWithMe in 2018. The campaign focused on how gender inclusive safer spaces could be created from the lens of normative change, and emphasized on the importance of empathy and intergenerational dialogue for the same, especially for adolescents and young people.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Lives Reached



2 Crore online

30 Lakh through mass media

Future Priorities

- To digitize the organization's curriculum for on-ground training
- To better leverage technology for programs and outreach to maximize impact and accelerate behavioral change

Challenges

- While initiating conversations around sensitive issues is important, it is critical to keep the momentum going. This requires the organization to revisit and re-engage with its audience at regular intervals, however, limited and time-bound funding becomes a challenge.
- The lack of inter-generational dialogue was observed as a strong issue during the implementation of the program.

Learnings

- Young people in Tier II cities often have limited opportunities to or platforms to engage holistically on these issues with their peers and change-makers, and so it is important to continue organizing such events in these cities.
- It is always effective to promote local role models, whose reality is more relevant and who have intrinsic cultural knowledge of the local community, and are therefore able to engage with them more pragmatically.

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FCRA ✓ 80G ✓ 12A ✓

Digital Empowerment Foundation

Facilitating access to public information services through entrepreneurship

● HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI ● YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2002 ● WEBSITE: WWW.DEFINDIA.ORG ● NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is one of the world's leading practitioners in the field of Information & Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D). Through all its diverse programmes, DEF seeks to help people living in information darkness overcome the information barrier. It does so by empowering communities to use digital tools and the Internet to access information and knowledge in an effort to empower themselves to achieve greater socio-economic equality. DEF works across six programmatic areas: Access & Infrastructure, Governance & Entitlements, Education & Empowerments, Markets & Social Enterprise, Knowledge Hub & Network, and Advocacy and Research.

Intervention in Spotlight: SoochnaPreneur

PROJECT PERIOD

2016 onwards

GRANT SIZE

USD 600,000

PRIMARY FUNDER

QUALCOMM (2016-2019)

The Problem

As much as 67% of India's population lives in rural parts of the country, and is largely dependent on government services and entitlements for some of their most basic needs and livelihood. However, they encounter various barriers in accessing these benefits. These could be related to levels of literacy, lack of timely and relevant information, distance from the village, role of dishonest intermediaries or inefficient government machinery, among other reasons.

Organization's Response

In 2013, DEF in partnership with the European Union implemented a pilot programme, called Soochna Seva, in five backward districts of five Indian states. The programme was built around facilitating access to information and entitlement at the last mile. Based on the experiential learning and insights from this programme, the project was then scaled up, with support from Qualcomm, and transformed into a largely self-sustainable model called SoochnaPreneur. This model aims to create a cadre of Rural Infor mation Change Agent, who leverage technology, to bridge the information gap between citizens and the government.

Model of Intervention

Under the SoochnaPreneur model, a group of identified youth and women from marginalized or vulnerable communities are trained and nurtured to work as SoochnaPreneurs (Information Entrepreneurs) to not only earn a livelihood for themselves, but to also facilitate access to entitlements for their community members. Equipped with an Android-based multilingual app, called MeraApp, that runs both online and offline and holds a catalogue of welfare schemes, the SoochnaPreneurs operate at panchayat and block levels and offers community members comprehensive information on entitlements, thus strengthening the information ecosystem at the local level, and facilitating access to government schemes and entitlements.

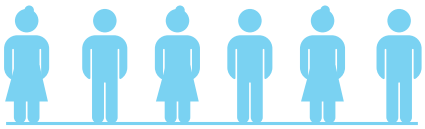
What the Intervention Has Achieved

The SoochnaPreneur project leverages the power of information and communication technology (ICT), along with the strength of human resource, to enhance the reach and benefits of different public welfare schemes and ensure last mile benefits to rural and remote regions of the country. With just a tablet and a printer as infrastructure, the intervention has the tremendous potential of replicability and scale-up and allows the SoochnaPreneurs to earn about USD 50 monthly by offering information services to rural and marginalised communities. The success of the model has led to its integration or replication across all interventions of the organisation at village level since 2018. This has been possible due to funding from from institutions, organisations and CSR groups such as NOKIA Networks, USAID, EquallyAble, Commonwealth of Learning, Facebook and US-India Policy Institute, among others.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Health | Education | Livelihood | Governance | Financial Inclusion | Gender

Lives Impacted



8 Million individuals

Future Priorities

- As the Covid crisis continues to loom overhead, SoochnaPreneurs have expanded their knowledge to offer community members information on the pandemic
- DEF wants to expand the project to all backward and marginalised districts of India through a wide network of SoochnaPreneurs who can offer information services in regional languages

Challenges

- Availability of seamless and regular connectivity at the last mile is a constant challenge, and hence the pilot was crucial to understand the value of an offline app that can sync information on the Cloud when network is available.
- A certain cost is involved in ensuring that the SoochnaPreneur has a banking correspondent ID, and the waiting period for the same can be long and erratic. Hence, this process should be initi-ated during the mobilisation to save time.

Learnings

- Despite social, cultural and technological challenges, the project has been able to expand its pool of SoochnaPreneurs by moving from an all-men's workforce to include an almost equal number of women and persons with disability.
- While an interest in entrepreneurship was available in the communities being served, DEF real-ised the need to nurture this entrepreneurial mindset further through trainings and capacity building that focused on both soft skills and hard skills, and has thus developed a multi-lingual toolkit for the same.
- Peer learning was seen to have a positive effect on the quality of services delivered while acting as a social buffer for SoochnaPreneurs to gain trust and support in the communities they serve.

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Digital Green

Empowering smallholder farmers to break the cycle of poverty through the power of digital technology

- HEADQUARTERS: SAN FRANCISCO AND NEW DELHI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2006
- WEBSITE: WWW.DIGITALGREEN.ORG
- NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Formed in 2006 Digital Green is a global development organization that empowers smallholder farmers to lift themselves out of poverty by harnessing the collective power of technology and grassroots-level partnerships. The organization creates scalable, cost-effective, technology-enabled behavior change communication by bringing together researchers, development practitioners, and rural communities to produce and share locally relevant information through videos. Digital Green has implemented projects in 10 states in India, and has a presence in 15 other countries across the world.

Intervention in Spotlight: FarmStack

PROJECT PERIOD

2019-PRESENT

GRANT SIZE

$1,331,869.00

PRIMARY FUNDER

WALMART FOUNDATION

The Problem

In Andhra Pradesh, farmer producer organizations (FPOs) bring farmers together to share best practices to improve their yields and help them to market their produce. However, such organizations often only offer generic information & services that are not relevant nor tailored to individual context. As a result, farmers are limited in their access to new information about agronomic practices that could have catalytic effects on agrarian practices and result in increased incomes and stable livelihoods.

Organization's Response

Digital Green worked with 10 FPOs and 95,000 cashew farmers in three districts in Andhra Pradesh to meet the overwhelming demand for information to improve yields and manage infections in cashew crops. It has focused on providing timely agronomic advisories to the farmers and testing how customized advisories and services delivered via multiple communication channels, like video and IVR can increase farmers' adoption of new practices, and consequently, their yields. Using these advisories, Digital Green also developed FarmStack, a data sharing platform for secure and automated data transfer.

Model of Intervention

FarmStack uses digital tools to offer farmers locally relevant, geographically specific and dynamic content on essential information that informs a range of decisions they face as farmers. The platform integrates localized and relevant information from multiple sources and disseminates it via mutually reinforcing analog and digital channels. Messages reach farmers via two complementary channels — Digital Green's video-enabled approach and interactive voice response (IVR). The intervention reaches both male and female farmers across socio-economic groups, through the targeted deployment of multiple digital channels.

What the Intervention Has Achieved

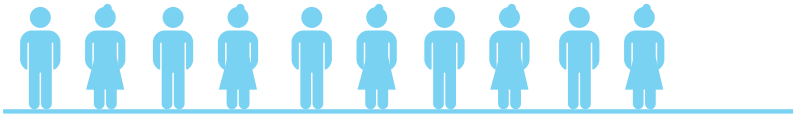
Digital Green has successfully integrated village-level weather data and forecasts with farm-specific data and soil information to contextualize and inform farmers with timely advisory messages. This has allowed them to take timely preventive measures to protect their crops.

Digital Green's work has helped bridge the communication gaps between horticulture experts from government agencies, FPO leaders, and the NGOs that work with them, and the organization considers it to be the first step towards coordinated delivery of extension advisory services. Through this intervention, the organization has reached 9,500 farmers (including ~30% women), trained them in the 8 best agronomic practices via videos and IVR (total 37 separate messages), and the farmers produced over 22-25 metric tons of raw cashew.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Health | Livelihood | Gender Inclusion | Environment | Agriculture

Lives Reached



1.9 million farmers **2.3 million** globally

Future Priorities

To codify governance and data standards to safeguard and protect the interests of farmers and organizations who work with them.

Challenges

- This continues to remain one of the challenges they face in their work. Farmers found the IVR messages understandable, but frequently lacked the resources or motivation to act upon the recommendations.
- While use of mobile technology has advantages in terms of speed and scale, there are still infrastructural and network-related challenges that hinder the medium's reach.
- Mobile-based interventions are successful in reaching men far more easily than women in farming families as mobile phones are still used primarily by the male members in the family and women are most often secondary or tertiary users.

Learnings

- Network continues to be an issue, especially for last mile connectivity, hence, human mediation is of prime importance.
- Advisory services must be dynamic, timely and localized, and should focus on the 'pull' or need for information, not just pushed information.
- The prevalence of low literacy levels among the target population called for the use of non-text-based information delivery channels.

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DIMAGI

Creating a sector-agnostic, customizable data collection and management software

- HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2002
- WEBSITE: WWW.DIMAGI.COM
- NATURE: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Brief history of the organization: Dimagi is a social enterprise whose mission is to use innovative digital solutions to support frontline workforces in creating sustained impact in low and middle-income countries. Dimagi's work spans a wide range of sectors and use-cases. Dimagi builds scalable, replicable platforms that anyone can configure for their own needs and offers professional services to support organizations in maximizing their use of digital platforms. Dimagi's interventions have been used across the areas of health, education, livelihoods, financial and gender inclusion.

Intervention in Spotlight: COMMCARE

PROJECT PERIOD

Varies per project

GRANT SIZE

Varies per project

PRIMARY FUNDER

N/A

Organizations have used CommCare in **130 countries** on six continents

The Problem

Despite organizations making the initial shift towards the incorporation of digital tools into their programs, there is a lack of interventions that can account for the vast and diverse challenges that exist across India in terms of digital infrastructure, linguistic variations and accessibility and usability at the last mile. The absence of digital tools that can be adapted to different programs and services has been a recurring challenge, along with the lack of digital literacy around app development and coding.

Organization's Response

In 2002, Dimagi developed CommCare as a result of a collaboration between a computer scientist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a physician from Harvard Medical School. The platform has since developed into a no-code platform that allows users with minimal background in app development to design and build digital tools for mobile, Web and desktop to serve unique, program-specific needs. The platform is sector-agnostic, and can be adapted to various programmatic needs ranging from maternal and infant health to agriculture, the provision of financial literacy programs, humanitarian aid response and education.

Model of Intervention

CommCare is a user-configurable system for data collection, documentation and case management. It is designed to be offline-first, and is adaptable across sectors to improve service delivery and incorporate user feedback. The app is designed to be multi-lingual and supports SMS, multimedia, and GPS, while ensuring compliance to relevant data security laws. CommCare's case management features enable collection of longitudinal data for various programs. It is easily adaptable to different geographies, programs and languages through its no-code platform and each customization is designed with the objective of being easy to use, accessible, and intuitive to the end user.

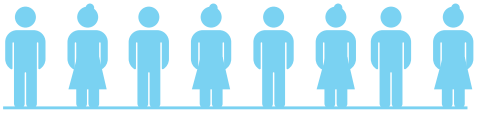
What the Intervention Has Achieved

Beginning as a tool for frontline healthcare workers, CommCare's effectiveness across sectors became evident. Since then, the tool has expanded to support programs across various sectors. The app has also been able to overcome barriers in access to digital infrastructure by keeping in mind the geography and demographic that it caters to: information can be entered into the app when offline, and the data syncs up whenever internet access is next available.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Healthcare | Agriculture | Financial Inclusion | Gender-based violence | Humanitarian response | Education

Lives Reached



CommCare has been used in over

2000

projects across the globe

Future Priorities

- To support non-profit partners to enable service delivery and tracking during crises such as COVID-19
- To deliver more educational and informational content directly to the end user
- To Identify avenues to leverage the vast body of data that has been collected through CommCare and its partners

Challenges

- CommCare allows for the collection and documentation of longitudinal data, and the team is currently exploring avenues to leverage and channel relevant data into programming, especially in high-risk programs or areas.
- Despite the tool's adaptability, it is often unable to bridge the gap between FLWs and individuals when used in programs dealing with sensitive issues such as gender-based violence. The tool, therefore, cannot account for the softer aspects of gender programs.

Learnings

- The value of tools such as CommCare is more evident than ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic has showcased this, as Dimagi has been able to adapt CommCare to add a COVID-19 lens in their existing programs, and to leverage the tool for services such as contact tracing and daily screenings where required.
- CommCare is deployed in partnership with non-profits or government bodies, which addresses the program's sustainability in the long-term. Dimagi provides the tool and capacity building to leverage it, assess data experts, and manage users, while the programmatic expert is able to manage the implementation and effectiveness of the program at large, as well as the sustainability of the digital infrastructure and resources provided to programs staff members.
- The tool relies heavily on a bottom-up approach that incorporates feedback and inputs from the last mile user to ensure it is accessible and relevant.

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Gram Vaani

Using voice and other appropriate technologies for locally relevant knowledge sharing and grievance redressal

● HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI ● YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2009 ● WEBSITE: WWW.GRAMVAANI.ORG ● NATURE: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Brief history of the organization: Gram Vaani is a social technology company that aims to reverse the flow of information: that is, to make it bottom-up instead of top-down, using simple technologies and social context to design tools. Gram Vaani has two main service offerings: sponsorships and community research on the Mobile Vaani network as well as information and communication technology (ICT) solutions.

Intervention in Spotlight: MobileVaani

PROJECT PERIOD

Varies per engagement

GRANT SIZE

Varies per engagement

PRIMARY FUNDER

Partnership-based model with NGOs

The Problem

Owing to the lack of clear and accessible information, people are often unable to access social entitlements and benefits or hold local systems accountable. Furthermore, the irregular distribution of the internet and technology across rural India has meant that information is concentrated in the hands of a few – with information segmented based on different social dynamics, and the cycle perpetuating itself through power structures within the community.

Organization's Response

Gram Vaani developed Mobile Vaani (MV), a voice-based system that enables the community to raise their voices, share their concerns and express their take on social issues. MV is an intelligent IVR (interactive voice response) system that allows people to call into a number and leave a message about their community, or listen to messages left by others. The platform hinges on ensuring equitable access to community media forums, thereby building awareness, promoting accountability and transparency at the last mile and, simultaneously, documenting data on service delivery.

Model of Intervention

Content for the platform is moderated both locally and centrally, and added to the interactive IVR and web platforms for mass consumption. The platform is connected to local government bodies, as well as non-profit and social enterprise partners. The platform allows users to share experiences and address queries, highlight gaps in government service delivery, combat limited awareness on social issues, and promote better understanding of agricultural practices. The app is also customizable to a variety of issues and services, often through civil society partnerships. Gram Vaani works closely with the government to achieve scale and relies on training volunteers for on-ground problem solving.

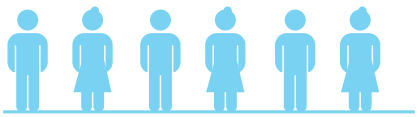
What the Intervention Has Achieved

The program's flagship deployment in Jharkhand and Bihar has over 100,000 unique monthly users that call over 10,000 times per day, and discuss wide ranging issues on culture, local updates and announcements, government schemes, and information sharing. Along with state-level platforms, it also consists of Community Radio Station partners across a number of states in India. The Mobile Vaani intervention has partnered with various non-profits to tackle issues around health and health technology, gender, child rights, governance and labor rights.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Health | Education | Livelihood | Governance | Financial Inclusion | Gender

Lives Impacted



Over
2.5 million
listening households

Future Priorities

- To ensure the availability of the Mobile Vaani app at the last mile to enable health workers to simultaneously capture and digitize health data
- To work on governance issues and improve impact pathways for the efficient resolution of griev-ances highlighted by community members
- To work more closely with the Government of India to ensure sustainability and scalability of programs

Challenges

- The evolving competition between large telecommunication companies has resulted in greater challenges in accessibility at the grassroots. For example, mobile service companies increasing the minimum balance required for incoming calls has led to people being unable to receive Mo-bileVaani calls. Highlighting a need for tech based interventions to continually adapt based on the changing infrastructural landscape.
- Challenges vary according to the social group and demographic, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and campaigns have to be contextualized. Often, creating the common ground to highlight or establish an issue as a problem is a hurdle.

Learnings

- The recent development of people being unable to receive calls has led to the creation of local listening groups, some targeted towards women or other groups, to ensure access to the platform.
- Gram Vaani's COVID-19 Hotline received 2.6 million calls from 800,000 users following the imposition of India's lockdown, indicating that contextual and relevant platforms will always pick-up traction.

Contact address: contact@gramvaani.org

FCRA ✓ 80G ✓ 12A ✓

MISSING

MISSING LINK TRUST

Building awareness against sex trafficking using immersive art and scalable technology

- HEADQUARTERS: MUMBAI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2015
- WEBSITE: WWW.SAVEMISSINGGIRLS.ORG
- NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Missing Link Trust primarily works on creating anti-trafficking awareness. MISSING was launched in 2014, as a public art work, at the India Art Fair, by Leena Kejriwal to engage the public on the issue of sex trafficking. The MISSING girl silhouette became a national symbol for millions of missing girls that get trafficked every day. Missing Link Trust's vision is to create a world where every girl is safe from sex-trafficking, and the organization aims to shape the next generation to contribute to a safer world through research-based advocacy.

Intervention in Spotlight
MISSING Game

PROJECT PERIOD

2015-2016 (APP DEVELOPMENT)

GRANT SIZE

INR 350,000

PRIMARY FUNDER

CROWD-SOURCING COMMUNITY

OVER 70 COUNTRIES INCLUDING INDIA: BANGLADESH, USA, PHILIPPINES, SOUTH KOREA, INDONESIA, BRAZIL, PAKISTAN

The Problem

Anti-trafficking work largely focuses on rescue and rehabilitation. However, preventive campaigns that have a big role to play in the prevention of exploitation and abuse, don't get enough attention. The lack of focus on preventive work means that the public, who is the biggest stakeholder for the issue of sex trafficking, is not part of the conversation. Along with increasing public awareness, there is a need to focus on adolescents, who as demand makers and consumers of porn, have an important impact on sex-trafficking. Missing wanted to ensure that adolescents were a key part of the dialogue.

Organization's Response

MISSING realized technology would be critical to public engagement. In order to create awareness and empathy for survivors of trafficking, MISSING created an immersive experience about what a girl goes through when she is forced into sex-trafficking or sold for money. The gaming space, with a community of over three million gamers, was a powerful space for them to combine art and technology to create unique empathy-building, immersive narratives and experiences for the public to engage with the issue of sex-trafficking.

Model of Intervention

Missing Game for a Cause, a role-playing game available for free download on mobile app store, allows its players to experience what a missing girl goes through when she is trafficked into the inhumane and cruel world of prostitution. The player gets into the shoes of the trafficked victim and experiences her frustration, vulnerability and helplessness. The perceptual positioning, of being able to step into the avatar of the girl, Champa, is crucial and it shapes the outcome—what the player takes away from the game—that is empathy. The MISSING Game is a powerful awareness tool for prevention of trafficking. It is part of MISSING's national educational program - The Missing Awareness and Safety School Program.

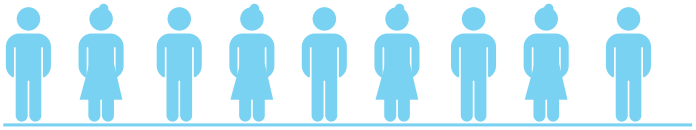
What the Intervention Has Achieved

The game has been covered by national and international platforms across the globe, making it a mainstream discussion which is very crucial for prevention of trafficking. The game has been translated into 12 regional languages to increase its reach. It has over one million organic downloads in more than 70 countries, and was trending #1 in Bangladesh on the App Store.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Education Gender

Lives Reached



1,000,000 online

Future Priorities

- To amplify the reach of the newly launched MISSING Interactive Digital Comic and an upcoming video game to raise further awareness about the issue
- To integrate the MISSING Public Artwork into MISSING Awareness and Safety School Programs (MASS-P) modules that schools can take up. These modules are being designed to fit seamlessly into different school programs

Challenges

- Financial viability and scalability of games for change pose a significant challenge. There is a lack of publishers for diverse games, which focus on diverse social issues, impacting their scalability.
- Audiences lack exposure to new narrative styles, formats and storylines. There is need for experimentation. Through increased exposure and experimentation an engaging audience can be experience the power of a new narrative.

Learnings

- Social causes can be layered and transformed into immersive narratives through powerful media like games, and reach worldwide audiences because gaming is rarely barred by national or cultural boundaries. Developing content in regional languages is necessary to penetrate into areas which are otherwise difficult to access.
- Diversity is possible in the gaming industry. Games have immense potential for representation and diversity yet everyone is hesitant or struggling to explore diverse narratives.

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FCRA ✓ 80G ✓ 12A ✓

PIRAMAL SWASTHYA

Building an accessible, integrated platform for universal health records as a public good

- HEADQUARTERS: HYDERABAD
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 2006
- WEBSITE: WWW.PIRAMALSWASTHYA.ORG
- NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Piramal Swasthya is a not-for-profit organization whose primary focus area is bridging public healthcare gaps by supplementing and complementing existing mechanisms created by the Government of India. The organization is focused on the primary public healthcare space with a focus on maternal health, child and adolescent health, and non-communicable diseases. Piramal Swasthya has operated various healthcare innovations at scale to address the primary healthcare needs of vulnerable populations across the country. Working as a public-private partnership (PPP), the organization seeks to provide customizable solutions that mitigate issues of accessibility and availability to provide technology-enabled quality healthcare services across India.

Intervention in Spotlight

ACCESSIBLE MEDICAL RECORDS VIA INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGIES (AMRIT)

PROJECT PERIOD

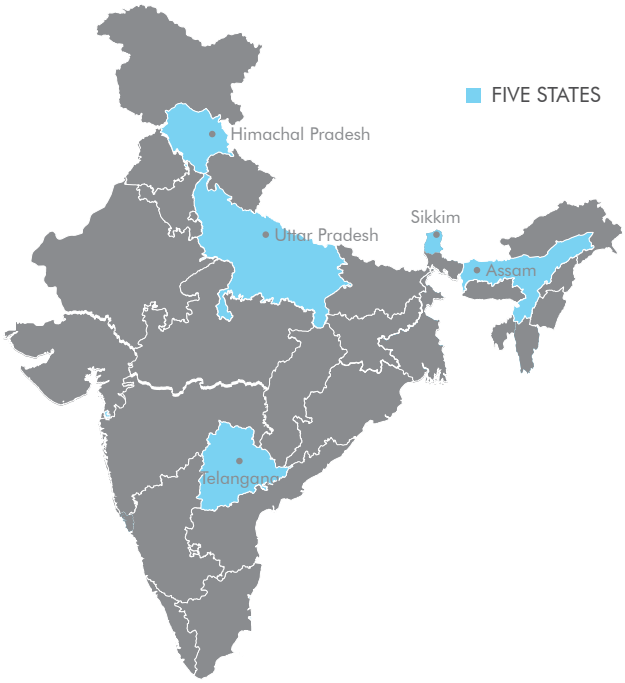
2018 Onwards

GRANT SIZE

USD 4 million

PRIMARY FUNDER

Self-financed through the Piramal Foundation and other private donors



The Problem

Although India has been taking steady steps towards adopting digital heath technologies, the reality is that the ecosystem continues to remain increasingly fragmented, with standalone applications and redundant software that is prone to poor quality of data and relevance. Often, healthcare workers are forced to maintain and enter records multiple times in multiple locations, and critical data is lost in between and across medical service providers, thereby posing significant challenges in access to holistic healthcare across the country.

Organization's Response

AMRIT is a platform that has established a digital health ecosystem that empowers the Indian public health system to be more responsive and resilient. AMRIT provides India with a beneficiary-centric health information platform that enables the generation of personal health records. The platform is flexible, scalable, and most importantly, interoperable with a plethora of health technologies, management systems, and software.

Model of Intervention

AMRIT is an electronic health records platform that connects various points of health service delivery and diverse facilities across the public health system in India. Simultaneously, the platform establishes a care continuum that enables closure of referral pathways for beneficiaries accessing healthcare at various facilities through mobile outreach programs, as well as through remote health consultations. AMRIT is designed to collect, translate, process, and communicate information from India's decentralized health system into a unified health database and interface. It is built on secure and scalable open-source technologies, and is compliant with National Digital Health Mission guidelines.

What the Intervention Has Achieved

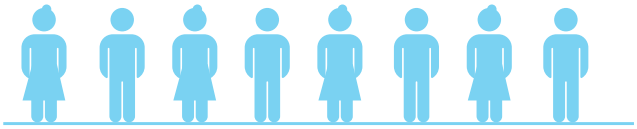
AMRIT assigns beneficiaries a unique health ID that has allowed health professionals to access medical history, track vitals, prescribe medication, and authorize and review laboratory test results during in-person or virtual consultations. It has enabled tele-consultations in resource-poor settings, or areas with poor connectivity. Collected data is anonymized and processed through AMRIT's built-in data analytics engine that enables predictive modelling for health surveillance, real-time data visualizations to monitor operational excellence, and creation of quality evidence for effective decision-making, design and policy execution.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Health

Governance

Lives Reached



>500,000 lives impacted

Future Priorities

- To build avenues for value enhancement and capability building for the AMRIT platform, including improving data analytics and efficiency
- To identify further areas for the deployment of AMRIT in line with government priorities

Challenges

- Infrastructural challenges persist, such as the lack of electricity and poor network connectivity in rural and hard-to-reach areas. This affects successful deployment, which adversely impacts adoption and perception of the technology.
- Doctors and frontline workers may be reluctant to adopt new technologies. There needs to be an enabling environment for them to learn and practice.

Learnings

- Working with the government, complementing their operations, and engaging with them in co-creating programs is vital in ensuring sustainability and consistency.
- It is essential to leverage and engage India's rural institutions dedicated to village development, grassroots movements, community leaders and self-help groups, in order to drive adoption of innovations at scale.

Contact address: reachus@piramalswasthya.org

FCRA ✓ 80G ✓ 12A ✓

Restless Development India

Empowering young changemakers with access to knowledge through a mobile-based platform

- HEADQUARTERS: NEW DELHI
- YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT: 1985
- WEBSITE: WWW.RESTLESSDEVELOPMENT.ORG
- NATURE: NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Brief history of the organization: Formed in 1985, Restless Development works with young people to ensure that this demographic group, everywhere, is able to demand and deliver a just and sustainable world. The organization's mission is to support young people to be leaders. This includes working with them to identify problems and work on solutions in their communities, and supporting them to advocate for long-lasting change that gets to the root causes of issues. Restless Development is registered as Student Partnership Worldwide India Project Trust in India

Intervention in Spotlight

Youth-Led Accountability on Family Planning 2020 and SDG 5

PROJECT PERIOD

2017-2020

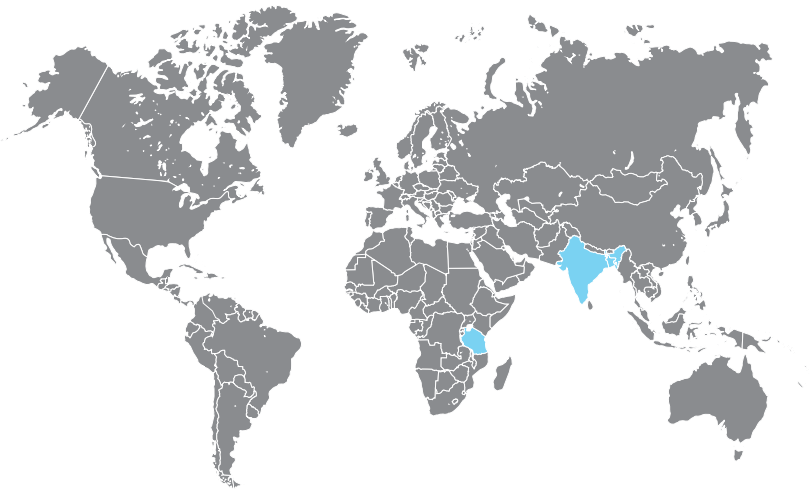
GRANT SIZE

USD 200,000

PRIMARY FUNDER

BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

■ INDIA (BIHAR, JHARKHAND, NEW DELHI, RAJASTHAN), TANZANIA (MOROTA, DODOMA)



The Problem

Ambitious global commitments such as the Family Planning (FP) 2020 commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) can't be achieved without meaningful youth participation. Failure to achieve these commitments by 2030 would affect young people, especially young women, the most. Thus, citizen and youth engagement in accessing and generating data to monitor and inform the progress of these frameworks is critical to their success, without which they may not reflect the needs and priorities of young people and communities.

Organization's Response

In partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Restless Development tested a model where young people could lead the initiatives through evidence gathered from local levels and use that data for advocating for their rights. They supported and trained young people to collect and share evidence, quantitative data and qualitative information based on lived experiences of their communities to ensure accountability and inform youth-led advocacy efforts at local, regional, national and global levels for FP 2020 and SGD 5 (Gender Equality) commitments.

Model of Intervention

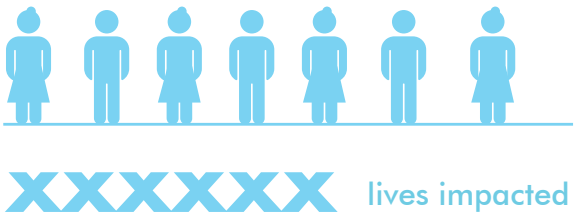
Restless Development has trained and mobilized 50 Youth Accountability Advocates (YAAs) and 234 young changemakers from India and Tanzania. These accountability advocates work in their local communities identifying issues related to SDG 5 and FP2020 commitments and seeking accountability from decision makers on resolving these issues through evidence based advocacy using locally generated data. They are supported by local coalition members and are mentored by Restless Development staff on their selected accountability projects all throughout this journey. In addition to this they also have access to an online platform called ' Youth Advocacy Tracker' which is an online web based platform that helps the youth accountability advocates to plan and design their on accountability projects as per a toolkit developed by Restless Development on youth led accountability. It also support them to to design campaigns and seek support from other accountability advocates working on similar projects. Data generated on the platform on its usage and on the accountability activities led by youth advocates is analyzed and presented as infographics which can then be used when communicating with different stakeholder

What the Intervention Has Achieved

Restless Development has built on the data collection and accountability activities undertaken by the YAAs in the pilot phase and have leveraged on the network of changemakers and coalition partners for improved implementation of SDG5 and FP2020 policy com-mitments. During the Nairobi Summit on on ICPD +25, the YCGE program engaged over 35 global youth-led and youth-serving partners, young leaders and YAAs and launched a Consensus Statement on Youth-led Accountability.

SECTORS SUPPORTED BY THE INTERVENTION

Lives Reached



Future Priorities

- To test and demonstrate the proof-of-concept of a replicable youth-led accountability model that achieves improved policy implementation of SDG5 and FP2020 commitments in India and Tanzania.
- To further amplify a movement for gender equality.

Challenges

- Restless Development's platform was offered in Hindi and English during the pilot phase. A significant challenge was the linguistic diversity in India. They have taken the platform offline to now integrate more languages.
- One of the major components of the program was data collection for evidence generation. Some of the YAAs found it difficult to design their own tools.
- While transitioning to Phase 2 of the program, some of the YAAs finished the academic courses and relocated to other states for career aspirations. Retention of Youth Accountability Advocates, hence, presented a challenge.

Learnings

- Restless Development used a tech platform to help YAAs develop their own accountability projects. The usage of the tech platform was after an induction training into the program, and provided an opportunity for staff to engage with YAAs from different states remotely.
- Restless Development formed coalitions of several grassroot organizations working locally to support the YAAs. The organization also helped the coalitions to organize campaigns and train them on various aspects of the program while the coalitions provided useful and necessary support for the Youth Accountability Advocates by providing them with access and linkages.

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Conclusion

The development sector in India has taken an increasing shine to digital platforms and innovations over the last two decades, with non-profits and community-based organization, working to incorporate digital tools and technology within the ambit of their programs over the last two decades. Organizations have looked to such interventions to variously improve efficiency, support rapid scale, and improve the reach of their programs, with mixed results.

The COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdown have marked a turning point in the way that digital innovations and technological platforms and tools figure into the welfare and development ecosystem; overnight, what had so far been a bonus to programs had become a necessity.

Even as some organizations have struggled to play catch-up and navigate this transition in an already difficult time, other organizations have capitalized on their experiences of making the transition earlier and in a more intentional manner. The report has been an effort towards documenting and disseminating know how, capturing insights from organizations that have made this transition successfully to enable others to make this transition. As organizations are reevaluating their programs in the face of the pandemic and its aftermath, the time is ripe for organizations to adopt a technology friendly lens right from the design phase of programs, if that's what their intervention demands.

This transition is not without its challenges. Gender continues to be a factor that impacts access to technology; women often lack access to technology or are not seen as the primary user of digital platforms. This hampers their access to healthcare, education, and livelihoods skills, while impacting the reach and efficacy of programs. Therefore, this is the first challenge that programs must account for this in their design and implementation. Second, there exists a significant disparity in access to smart technology between urban and rural India. This disparity is further conditioned by class (digital penetration remains low amongst the urban poor) and gender digital penetration remains low amongst girls and women. Programs must thus account for this variance in order to ensure that the most vulnerable receive access to the benefits that could lift them out of poverty and enable them to live lives of dignity. Finally, it is important to protect against the possibility that deploying technological tools and platforms without an adequate understanding of the ecosystem could lead to the reiteration of the digital divide. For instance, with teaching and learning moving online during the pandemic, we must ensure that students without access to devices of their own still have a chance to access quality education. These challenges demonstrate the importance of asking: *"What can we do to navigate the challenges of unequal and inequitable distribution of digital tools at the community level?"*

Even as access to technological tools for beneficiaries remain an issue, organizations also face significant hurdles in deploying them. There is a limited understanding of what it means to build a digital innovation for welfare delivery. Consequently, partnerships and infrastructure that can enable scale remain limited and risk averse in their design. In an effort to mitigate some of these hurdles, community mobilisation and pilot are of key importance. These are some key findings that have emerged through our conversations with sector experts. In order to address these challenges, it is important that the core stakeholders – non-profits, funders, government, and other stakeholders – each play their part in building an ecosystem that can support the deployment of technology and digital innovation. Thus, it is extremely necessary to understand the community and its needs as well as the limitations and benefits of the technological solution that is to be deployed. And so it is crucial to ask: *"How do we push for the adoption and integration of technology in a manner that is sustainable and impactful?"*

For non-profits, we uncovered some industry-wise practices that could prove valuable to any organiza-tion planning to transition into the digital space, from ensuring that communities are included and consulted in the design to building useful and easy-to-consume content, to ensuring a regular feedback loop. Perhaps the most critical of these is the exhortation to centre the end-user in the design and deployment of digital innovations. Working with the end user offers the opportunity to ensure that the intervention is addressing the right gaps and engaging with the right stakeholders, which in turn results in better uptake of the tool.

Funders and donors have a critical role to play in dictating what shape and form programs take on the ground, and thereby have a unique opportunity to ensure the timely and strategic deployment of innovative digital solutions, create the conditions that allow the proliferation of digital infrastructure and the availability of digital tools. Second, funders and donors have the ability to support risk-taking by funding out-of-the-box and long-term solutions that work on preventive measures. While such measures lend themselves less to impact narratives in the short-term, they pay off in the long term and are uniquely valuable to creating a thriving ecosystem of change.

Our conversations with sector leaders show that the government is a key stakeholder in the process of bridging the digital divide – they must prioritize the availability of digital infrastructure in rural areas, and offer alternate solutions (such as community networks) to ensure last mile-connectivity for all. They also command the largest platform in the form of their frontline staff that can be used to demonstrate the value of digital tools, training and localized content. Policies for effective digital literacy and timely delivery of infrastructure can be critical for this.

Finally, other stakeholders, such as private players can use this moment to identify non-linear entry points into offering programs and services on the ground, create strategic, relevant, and hyper-local content, support the proliferation of digital tools, and most important, create an atmosphere of understanding and valuing digital innovations for empowerment. Thus, as we identify unique roles for each of these partners, it is important to begin to ask ourselves and each other: *"How can we bring together and foster partnerships between civil society, funders, and the government to further push for the adoption and use of digital tools, especially for the welfare of adolescents?"*

As COVID-19 continues to transform the world as we know it, there is the opportunity to pause, take stock, and learn from peers in order to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the truly vulnerable and enabling them to lead a life of dignity.

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