




Digital
WOMEN
of Rural India

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PREFACE



Life of women in the rural parts of our country is changing fast. Today, they are the decision makers, opinion givers, and more-so-ever, hold greater access to digital technology. Mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives who have experienced the power of technology are now the torchbearers of the Digital Inclusion movement. Digital Empowerment Foundation has helped create immeasurable impact stories through dedicated effort in 22 states across the country covering over 160 locations. These real stories mirror the socio, economic, behavioral and cultural transformations among rural women who have been impacted through DEF's flagship programme-Community Information and Resource Centres (CIRCs). These CIRCs offer access to rights and entitlements, information, digital skills and digital literacy. These women are a ray of hope and an inspiration to everyone. We hope these stories enlighten you and give you a chance to reflect upon the widespread scope of digital empowerment in our country.

CHITHRA BECOMES COMPUTER LITERATE DESPITE WEAK EYESIGHT






28 year old Chithra belongs to Puducherry. Extremely weak eyesight caused due to genetic defect made her drop out of school after 9th standard. She couldn't even do any household chores and most of her time would go sitting idle. She started making Gajras at home to pass her time and earn some money too. Her life was nearly standstill till one day she learnt through her friends living next-door about the CIRC opened in her locality. Chithra desired to learn computers, but was unsure if she would be able to do so with her weak eyesight. But she decided to give it a shot. Chithra's mother was initially reluctant to send her daughter to CIRC, but finally agreed on the condition that her friends Nandhini and Deepa would accompany her to the centre. Within few weeks, she learnt working on various computer applications, like Paint and MS Office. She can now save files and change desktop background. Centre staff makes extra effort to make computer learning convenient and enjoyable for Chithra. This includes enlarging computer icons so that she can work with ease. She is also very active on social media and has a Facebook account that she uses to chat and connect with her friends and family. In future, Chithra would like to teach computer to her mother as well.



CIRC Vaithikuppam is located in one of the semi-urban areas of Puducherry. The area is inhabited predominantly by the fisherman community. Youth residing in this regions seeks vocational courses for skill development

**‘NEVER LOSE CONFIDENCE
AND WATCH SUCCESS COME
YOUR WAY’, BELIEVES DIGITALLY
LITERATE HASNABINA**





Hasnabina Khatun is 20 years old, hailing from Lochanmati, a remote village in District Murshidabad of West Bengal. She lives with her mother. Due to her father's passing away, the grieving family was plunged in to financial difficulties, as he was the only bread-earner. Hasnabina almost dropped out of school due to her inability to pay the fee. Braving it all, she worked hard to support her education as well as her family. During a mobilisation activity organised by the staff of CIRC Hariharpara, Hasnabina came to know about the Basic Computer Course offered at the centre.


She hesitated in the beginning, but finally decided to join the course. Considering her condition, the CIRC staff offered her job as a volunteer at the centre. Today, Hasnabina not only learns computers, but also works to earn money to support her further education. She has also joined English speaking and professional development course offered at the centre. She strongly believes that computer today has become backbone to everything that goes around the world. She also wants to tell other women like her to always stay confident and watch success come their way.



CIRC Hariharpara is located in one of the semi-urban regions of the Murshidabad District of West Bengal. Youth residing here seeks courses that would enhance their employable skills.

**WITH DIGITAL LITERACY, ASHMA
CAN OPEN HER BANK ACCOUNT
FROM HOME**






BA final student Ashma lives with her parents in Wadsa town in District Gadchiroli of Maharashtra. She is the youngest of three sisters. Ashma realised one day that along with formal education, one should also hone their professional skills in order to stay ahead in the competition. And so she decided to join the Basic Computer Literacy course offered by the dCIRC which was operating close to her house. Within two months she learnt working on various computer applications including programs of MS Office. At the same time, she acquired knowledge of internet that she uses in her day-to-day activities, such as online shopping and composing and sending emails. Today, she knows and can teach others too how to open a bank account from the comforts of home with the help of internet.



dCIRC Wadsa is situated in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. Most of the population living here belongs to tribal communities. The dCIRC has been helping the community with its ICT and non ICT interventions

**IN FUTURE, PREETHI WOULD USE
COMPUTERS IN HER NURSING
PROFESSION**






Preethi is a 16 year old living in Vaithikuppam of Puducherry with her parents. She has always wished to become a nurse one day, but at the same, she also felt the need of learning computers to enhance her professional skills. However her knowledge of computers was limited. When she learnt about the CIRC opened near her house, she decided to join its computer literacy course. Today, she works confidently with the various programs of MS Office including word processor, PowerPoint and Excel. She uses the internet to search for information on new educational opportunities in the field of nursing. Besides, she also likes to surf the internet to collect photographs of her favorite film actors. In the future, Preethi would use her computer skills in keeping records of patients. She would also like to use the internet to search and read about any new development around the world in the field of nursing and medicine.



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**A PERSON MUST NEVER STOP
LEARNING: BELIEVES DIGITALLY
LITERATE NANDABAI**






42 year old Nandabai Raghunath Bodre lives in Kerala village in district Aurangabad of Maharashtra. She had only completed her fifth standard when she got married. But she had always wanted to study further and hence after couple of years, she completed her 7th standard and found work at an Anganwadi as a helper. However, her passion to learn more didn't fade. She went forward and completed her matriculation. In a meeting conducted at the Anganwadi by the CIRC team, Nanda was the first person to come forth and express her interest in learning computers. She then took leadership and encouraged her colleagues, women from the local Self Help Group and college students too to join the CIRC and become digitally literate. Today, she manages her home and work, as well as visits CIRC Bhavan every evening without fail and tries to learn as much as she can in the digital world. She believes that a one should never stop learning new things throughout their life.



dCIRC Bhawan is a village situated in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra. Inhabitants of Bhawan today are making use of digital tools and their knowledge of computer in their day-to-day lives.

LALITA ENCOURAGES OTHERS FROM HER TRIBE TO BECOME DIGITALLY LITERATE






Lalita is a resident of village Krishnaganj in District Shivpuri of Madhya Pradesh. Lalita belongs to the Sehriya tribe, one of the most backward tribes in the country that lags behind in several developmental parameters. Lalita is one of the very few girls from her tribe who completed her formal schooling. During one of the school mobilisations conducted, the staff of dCIRC Pohri met Lalita, a 12th standard student at that time. The knowledge that she received about the CIRC programme and the plethora of activities the centre has been undertaking to digitally empower the community impressed Lalita. With no further ado, she got herself enrolled at the dCIRC. She had virtually no knowledge of the device prior to joining the centre. However, with her will power and zeal to learn, she not only learnt the basics of computer, the internet. Today, she enjoys learning even more as she could easily find video tutorials on YouTube for any new skill she wishes to acquire. Keeping a positive attitude, Lalita wishes to propagate her knowledge to others in her community as well.



Pohri is one of the semi urban regions of District Shivpuri of Madhya Pradesh. dCIRC opened in this area has helped the youth enhance their skills through digital education.

ACCESS TO INTERNET KEEPS MNREGA WORKER CHIROJI AWARE OF HER RIGHTS






A large number of beneficiaries of information empowerment are MGNREGA workers who are often misled about their privileges and the right amount of wages they are supposed to receive. One such beneficiary is Chiroji Bai Jatav who worked in road construction at one of the villages of Bakanpura in Rajasthan. After completion of her work, she visited the Gramin Bank to collect her earnings, where the bank officer handed her 1000 rupees for her worked that spanned 11 days. Skeptical about the money she received, Chiroji visited CIRC Bakanpura and with the help of the centre staff, checked her muster roll on the MGNREGA online portal. To her surprised, she learnt that she was in fact supposed to receive a total of 1100 rupees from the bank. She went back to her bank where the officer was abashed as well as surprised by Chiroji's astuteness. He duly gave her back the remaining 100 rupees. It was later realised that like her, several other coworkers have been deceived and deprived by the same bank of the rightful amount that must receive. The Village Panchayat ensures that MGNREGA workers are encouraged to visit the CIRC to check their muster roll themselves and protect themselves from any type of fraud.



Bakanpura is remote village located on the tribal belt of Dsistrict Baran in Rajasthan. The CIRC located in this village has been dispelling information darkness helping the community stay aware of their rights.

ARUNDHATI ENHANCES HER EMBROIDERY SKILLS WITH KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNET






Arundhati Singh is a student of basic digital literacy at CIRC Halduchaur in District Nainital of Uttarakhand. A school student, she has a penchant for embroidering. She has been creating beautiful embroidery patterns, including Kaath Kadhai and Chinese Stitch Kadhai. Today, with the help of the knowledge of internet that she has acquired at the basic digital literacy course, Arundhati has started to search for new and modern patterns of embroidering online. She also likes to search for new techniques of stitching that she can implement in her work. These patterns if made on sarees or suits would add a new charm to the garment attracting a large number of customers. In a way, internet has helped Arundhati enhance her skills. Arundhati shares that a total of Rs 50 goes in to embroidering a small patch, as shown in the video. 'Such embroidery pieces have great demand in the market. I am sure I will be able to sell these pieces and earn good money from home', shares Arundhati.



Halduchaur is a town located in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand. The digital education imparted to women and youth by CIRC Halduchaur has helped them enrich their inherent talents and life skills

**AGE IS NO BAR WHEN ONE HAS THE
PASSION TO LEARN: SAYS KUMUD**



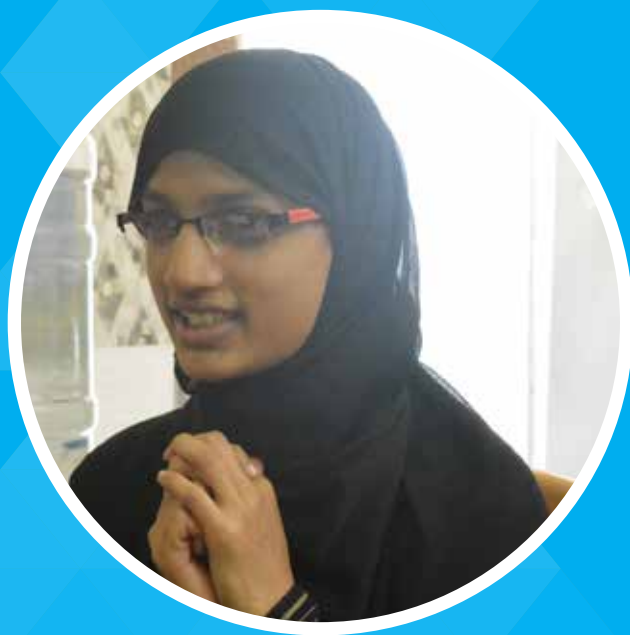



Pandey Kumud Sinha originally hails from Asthua, a village in district Darbhanga of Bihar. Currently, she resides in Puducherry with her son and daughter-in-law. Despite a being double master's degree holder, Kumud had very limited knowledge of operating a computer. Though she always wished to use it, her lack of confidence stopped her from operating the device. Some time ago, she learnt about CIRC Vaithikuppam and regarding the basic digital literacy course taught there. Almost 70 at the time, Kumud hesitated a little in the beginning, doubtful whether she would be able to grasp the new knowledge at the age. However after a brief orientation from the centre staff, Kumud joined the basic digital literacy classes at the CIRC. She was indeed a fast learner. She soon was not only able to work with basic computer applications, but the internet as well. It was to her true delight when she learnt emailing. She had always wished to write regularly to her daughter who has been studying abroad. Today, At the centre, Kumud writes her an email everyday, and receives her response in return. Furthermore, her son has recently gifted her a tablet, keeping her digitally connected even from home.



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**WITH DIGITAL EDUCATION,
RAZIYA GIVES MEANING TO HER
STANDSTILL LIFE**






Despite being a bright student in her school, Raziya Sultana had to drop-out of school after she completed her 10th standard. This was due to the conservative outlook her parents had towards girl's education. Although she accepted her fate, she always desired to learn more and equip herself with not only technical but also life skills which would render meaning to her nearly stand-still life. After several failed attempts, she finally convinced her parents to allow her to learn computers. She was aware of the CIRC Nagavara being located close to her house and got herself enrolled in its basic digital literacy course. 'Raziya is a smart kid, but she has very short attention span' chuckles trainer Nusrath, when asked about her student. While Raziya explains '(Nusrath) ma'am is a great inspiration for me. I wouldn't have been able to learn the computer this fast had she not been there'. In a short time, Raziya learnt several computer applications, and also various functions of the internet. Although she has completed the course, Raziya, even today often visits the centre to practise and to help and guide new batches on the digital literacy curriculum.



Nagavara is a peri-urban area of Bengaluru city in Karnataka. The CIRC in Nagavara is digitally skilling women of all age groups, helping them explore better employment opportunities.

**BESIDES DIGITAL LITERACY,
SHEELA GAINS NEW CONFIDENCE
IN PUBLIC SPEAKING**






Sheela Shelakoti is an M.Com student from Halduchaur in Uttarakhand. She came to know about CIRC Halduchaur from her friends. Due her curiosity to know more, she checked the centre's Facebook page, a page that bustles with new activities and updates. She was completely impressed with the centre's work and decided to get herself enrolled in the basic digital literacy course. Within the course, she liked especially the style of teaching, which was very activity based. Prior to joining the course, Sheela had virtually no knowledge of computers. However, at the centre, she learnt the computer at her own pace of understanding. Today, she can work with several computer applications; MS PowerPoint being her favourite. Additionally, besides computers, Sheela also enhanced her public speaking skills. As a part of regular assignments, the students at CIRC Halduchaur are asked to conduct a village walks, collect data on various topics and present it in a PowerPoint presentation. Sheela too, accomplished her assignment and made a confidence packed presentation in front her classmates.



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RANJITA LEADS WOMEN OF HER VILLAGE TOWARDS DIGITAL LITERACY






Ranjita Patra lives in the village of Bagamara in Bhadrak district of Odisha. She was married off right after she completed her schooling, putting an end to her further education. She along with her family was living under abject poverty, with only her husband being the sole bread earner. Ranjita desired strongly to support her family income. However, owing to her limited education and skillset, she could not get a job. Things soon began to transform, when Ranjita realised the importance of becoming digitally literate. Today, Ranjita is handling managerial responsibilities at various Self Help Groups at her village. Things changed when Ranjita learnt about dCIRC Geltua opened in her village. First, Ranjita acquired knowledge of computers at the centre and learnt how to work with its various applications. Ranjita then gathered woman folk at her village and explained them the importance of having digital knowledge. She then offered the dCIRC team some space within her residence to conduct special digital literacy classes for women and girls. Today, Ranjita supports the dCIRC team in accomplishing their goal of digital literacy as women regularly gather at her house to learn how they can use digital skills in their in day-to-day life.



Geltua is a rural area located in Bhadrak district of Odisha. At a place which lacked access to anything digital, dCIRC Geltua today is benefiting the community by making digital knowledge and tools easily available.

**VAISHALI USES DIGITAL TOOLS TO
CONNECT WITH THE WOMEN OF
HER COMMUNITY**






Vaishaliben Damor resides in Dahod District of Gujarat. Due to financial constraints Vaishali had to drop out of school after completing 7th standard and married off at a very young age. Her husband had studied only till 10th standard. Neither Vaishali nor her husband could get a job, plunging them further in to poverty. Vaishali decided to complete her education and her husband supported her decision. With her hardwork, Vaishali successfully cleared her 10th standard exam. She was soon offered a job at Naari Adalat Sangathan, a group dedicated towards women justice and empowerment. During one of the mobilisation meetings, Vaishali met the team of dCIRC Dahod. After learning about the various undertakings of the dCIRC in terms of digital literacy, she expressed how she desired to learn computers as often she felt the need to use digital tools to connect better with the women on field. She got herself enrolled in to the basic digital literacy course. Within a month, she could work with several computer applications. Today, Vaishali makes extensive use of videos to connect with the women in her village to educate them on various issues. She also encourages them to become digitally aware and make use of digital tool in their daily life.



dCIRC Dahod is located in one of the rural areas in Dahod District of Gujarat. The centre has been helping the rural communities by imparting knowledge regarding the usage of various digital tools.

**INTERNET SKILLS OPENED TO
SHALU A TREASURE BOX OF
KNOWLEDGE**






Shalu lives in Pohri, a small town within District Shivpuri of Madhya Pradesh. Shalu finds special interest in searching for new information on the internet and watching video tutorials on YouTube. However, there was a time when Shalu had very limited knowledge of the internet, the computer or other digital devices, such as the tablet. When one of her friends informed her about the dCIRC opened within Pohri, she decided to join its basic digital literacy course, which was also where Shalu touched a tablet for the first time. The trainers at the centre took special care that their students learn at their own pace. They also ensured that plenty of activity based exercises are incorporated to make the learning more engaging. Gradually, Shalu learned how to work on the tablet and the computer. Shalu always had a hobby of collecting and reading general knowledge books. Today, her capability of using the internet has opened to her a treasure box of knowledge from across the globe.



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**WITH THE HELP OF CIRC, PINKI
REGULARLY RECEIVES HER
WIDOW PENSION**





This story is an example that illustrates how digital knowledge is a purveyor of information empowerment, which ultimately helps an individual shape a better life for themselves. Pinki was a widow living in Wazirabad area of Delhi with her three children. Lonely and helpless, she neither had any support nor guidance to improve life for herself and her children. She was completely unaware of the government schemes that were specially launched to benefit widows. One day, Pinki learnt about the CIRC opened in her locality where she could obtain any information, especially about Government schemes and entitlements. When she visited the CIRC with her mother-in-law, she not only came to know about the widow pension scheme, but also received thorough assistance from the centre staff while applying for the same. Just within few months, Pinki received a pension of Rs. 12,000, giving her a ray of hope. Once again, CIRC reaffirmed its commitment towards creating information empowered communities.



Wazirabad is an urban-slum located in Delhi. Along with imparting digital literacy, the CIRC Wazirabad also ensure that people of the community stay well-informed of their rights and entitlements

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TOWERS

