



Imparting Digital Literacy to Rural Women in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh

Against the backdrop of existing barriers that are steep for rural women to climb to annihilate the existing digital divide, our Technology and Rural Advancement for Women Empowerment through Annihilating Digital Divide (TARA WE ADD) project, supported by Reliance Foundation, aims to encourage women to gain access to not only digital technology through mobile phones but also knowledge, which further leads to empowerment. Under the project, we conducted a 2-month long activity workshops, commenced on 7 March, 2022 to make more than 800 women from 16 villages in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh literate.

There are three phases of the project - Phase I – to transform the social and cultural perceptions attached to rural women's capacity to learn and operate smartphones, and thus, lead her own emancipation; Phase II – to build confidence in these women through knowledge enhancement and aspiration building using a smartphone, and; Phase III – this will focus on training, upskilling, and connecting micro entrepreneurs with online platforms, which can allow them to enhance their incomes.

The aforementioned activity was organised as part of the second phase of the project. During the workshops, which were conducted in villages' community centres, community advocates or **smartphone didies** from these villages were instrumental in bringing about a change in the information level and digital skills of these women. There were five modules consisting of 23 chapters, which were used to teach and empower these women. The modules were arranged in the order of knowledge advancement to use a smartphone in daily lives and penetration of technology in the way these women think and act. The modules are as follows:

- Module 1: *Smartphone se jaan pehchan*
- Module 2: *Har kaam aasan smartphone ke saath*
- Module 3: *Smartphone se swasthya*
- Module 4: *Paise ki baat, smartphone ke saath*
- Module 5: *Smartphone se smart bano*

On any typical day of the activity, 15–20 women were divided in 4–5 groups, sitting in concentric circles with their crew. The crew system allowed us to ensure team work as we understand that



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learning is a social process than an individual's struggle alone. We witnessed changes and interesting stories that emerged over the two months.

A number of women have been able to access government schemes on mobile phones particularly *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna*. They were demonstrated how they can use Youtube and Google assistant on their smartphones to get know-how of various government schemes, procedural requirements, and even apply online for some of them. Accessibility to e-healthcare services also emerged as one of the usefulness of mobile applications covered in the curriculum which included two platforms, i.e., government's e-Sanjeevni and private application myUpchar. Being in Hindi, these applications encouraged women to take online appointments from specialists while cutting down on travel expenses and long waiting queues.

Digitisation of government services and on-ground schemes had left these women perplexed, particularly those who lacked digital skills. A number of women who work as *Gram Mate* as part of MNREGA are required to record attendance and upload work photographs digitally. These women were highly benefited from our workshops, which allowed them to do their work efficiently.

More and more women have started using their mobile phones to communicate not only within their families but on social media platforms as well. One such woman, Sudha Sahu, from Bharatpura village, aspires to upload her video on Twitter to demand an action by her area's municipality to clean litter lying around in her village. Women like Sudha are seen as changemakers for the programme's next phase for which we are set to work with a group of these enthusiastic women who would lead by example in usage of digital aids and technology to improve their socio-economic conditions.

