

USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative

AirJaldi



CLOSING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE



THE PROBLEM

In South Asia, the gender disparity in mobile phone ownership stands at 28 percent and a staggering 58 percent for mobile Internet use.¹ In India, this lack of connection is worse for women living in rural and semi-rural areas. For these women, barriers to mobile ownership and Internet use include not only a lack of physical access and affordability, but also low awareness of technology's benefits, lower digital literacy skills, and safety and security concerns.

With these barriers in mind, the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative is working with India-based Internet service provider AirJaldi to increase the number of women with fast, reliable, and meaningful Internet connectivity, ultimately contributing to their social, economic, and individual well-being. AirJaldi is working in the rural and semi-rural Indian states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, providing women with subsidized Internet connectivity packages, technical support, and training on Internet usage and related content.



THE PROJECT

At the core of their programming, AirJaldi has created a Connectivity, Tools, Training, and Technical Support (C+3T) package for their users, which includes subsidized connectivity through installation and monthly usage fees, a package of software solutions, training programs, and continued technical support on the received trainings and software. AirJaldi sees fast, reliable, and data-rich connectivity as life-changing for rural women, as mobile phones are the main way to access the Internet.

Through their digital literacy training, AirJaldi works to ensure these women have the skills and encouragement they need to maximize the benefits of connectivity. Training is also available to women who are not specifically connected to the Internet through one of AirJaldi's packages. For that, AirJaldi has partnered with community-focused organizations to offer needs-based training to the organizations' women-based groups. Through their partnership with Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS)—a rural development department of the Jharkhand government that aims to improve the well-being of poor rural families in the state—AirJaldi has set up public hotspots and provided both virtual and in-person trainings to women in four districts: Ramgarh; Khunti; Ranchi; and Sahibganj. Self-directed training is also offered using AirJaldi's in-house Learning Management System (LMS) developed specifically for the program.

AirJaldi's basic training module was developed to introduce users to the digital world. It has units about the importance of the Internet, real-life lessons on how to use platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube, and practical sessions for AirJaldi's services such as how to access nearby hotspots and their LMS platform. With an emphasis on a human-centered design approach, AirJaldi regularly conducts focus groups and needs assessments to ensure trainings are tailored to their users' needs. Based on this feedback, AirJaldi regularly updates the module to make it more effective for groups with differing levels of digital knowledge and literacy.

1. Connected Women — The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2019, GSMA GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2019.pdf

THE RESULTS

By establishing partnerships with local government entities such as JSLPS, AirJaldi has been able to expand its reach to more women in remote locations, with over 10,000 women expressing interest in participating in digital literacy trainings. The partnership has also helped AirJaldi identify over 40 locations in which their hotspots could be set up.

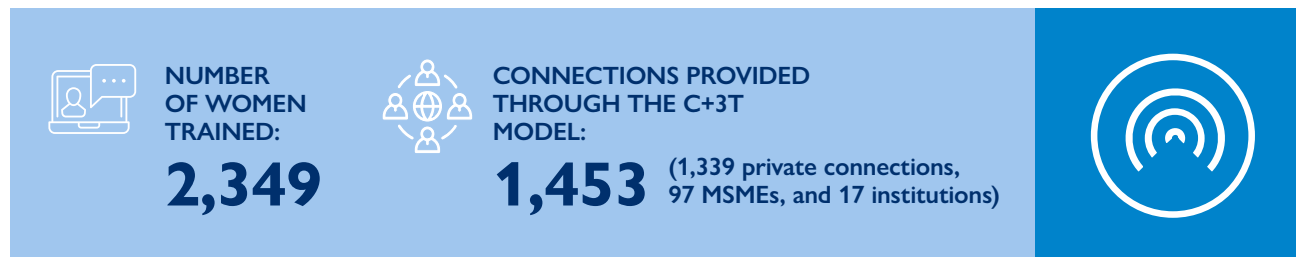
Sweaksha Biswakarma, a training participant and student based in the state of Sikkim, noted the high demand for these services, “online classes have become an essential part of my studies and without a doubt, the [AirJaldi program] has provided excellent services. Putting up Wi-Fi Internet and broadband in villages and encouraging women in this scheme with low costs is a great idea. It has benefitted many working women and students in their day-to-day lives. The online training which is provided by the AirJaldi team is helpful for knowing Internet uses and benefits in daily life.”

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SWEAKSHA, STUDENT

By providing C+3T and training packages, AirJaldi aims to narrow the digital divide for rural women and overcome the barriers of lack of awareness, access, cost, skills, support, and societal constraints preventing women from being online. The project not only demonstrates how affordable connectivity and digital skills training can benefit rural women, but also offers a model for other Internet providers interested in reaching rural women with products tailored to their needs.

AirJaldi’s work advances the overarching goal of the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative to bring meaningful connectivity to more women around the world. To learn more about the USAID/Microsoft Airband Initiative, click [here](#).



Figures between June 2021 and Dec. 2022