



# Dattopant Thengadi Foundation

Date: 19/07/2021

## Minutes of the discussion titled "Increasing Importance of Digital Literacy in the Post-COVID world"

On the occasion of World Youth Skills Day, Dattopant Thengadi Foundation organised an online panel discussion "Increasing Importance of Digital Literacy in the Post-COVID world" on July 15, 2021.

The session was chaired by **Shri Hiranmay Pandya, President, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh**. The panel included Ms. Manali Shah, Arvind Francis, Dr. Santosh Mehrotra, Ms. Harsh, Mr. Syed Sultan and Ms. Lata Gautam.

The discussion started with the welcome note by **Shri Virjesh Upadhyay, DG, Dattopant Thengadi Foundation**. He set the tone for the discussion by noting that launched on 1st July, 2015, 'Digital India' has been one of the biggest success stories of New India — enabling services, bringing Government closer to citizens, promoting citizen engagement and empowering people. The Best example is e-NAM. India's smartphone base is estimated to reach more than 820 million by 2022. He also referred to a report jointly released by Indian Cellular and Electronics Association and consulting firm KPMG, rural India witnessed a year-on-year growth of 35% in 2018 as opposed to 7% growth in urban India in the same period in terms of internet users. Smartphone penetration in rural India has risen from 9% in 2015 to 25% in 2018. He also mentioned the fall in Data Prices from Rs 152/GB in 2016 to Rs 10/GB 2019 and increase in data consumption per user has increased from 2.7 GB/month in 2016 to 10.4 GB/month in 2019. He further noted that the percentage of smartphone users above the age of 25 years has increased from 40 per cent in 2013 to 54 per cent in 2018. Access to the internet is becoming more equitable across genders as well, with a 42:58 split of women to men in the user base. Internet penetration through smartphones in rural India is growing in double digits, bridging the divide between urban and rural India. With a 35 per cent growth rate, Bihar and Odisha have the highest growth rate for new internet user addition in 2018. Talking about current initiatives he said that because of digital infrastructure created by the government in the last few years the reach of fast and reliable internet is upto the village level. To enhance this reach, the Union Cabinet, accorded approval for revised implementation strategy of BharatNet

through Public Private Partnership mode in 16 States of the country. BharatNet will now extend upto all inhabited villages beyond Gram Panchayats (GPs), in the said States. The revised strategy also includes creation, upgradation, operation, maintenance and utilization of BharatNet. The penetration and proliferation of broadband is also expected to increase direct and indirect employment and income generation. Further he noted that the digitalisation of schemes and services will remove intermediaries ensuring leakage-free delivery of the intended benefits. Similar pace towards digitalisation and is being seen in the labour market also. Concluding his remark with highlighting that the Covid-19 pushed the pace of digitalisation further, the rise of companies like urban clap etc. is expected to increase the importance of digital literacy and be able to work with platforms for occupations like plumber, hairdresser, mechanic etc., he invited Ms. Manali Shah to initiate the discussion.

**Ms. Manali Shah** (*National Secretary, Sewa*) appreciated the discussion as it was the right topic at the right time. Taking workers into consideration who suffered the most during the pandemic in terms of job loss and no livelihood, she elaborated on the need of going digital in the current scenario. She shared her SEWA's experience of being connected with other members digitally. Situations made to train leaders and workers on digital platforms like webex, google meet, zoom, etc. Talking about Telemedicine Concept, she said that many people have benefited through telemedicine as it bridged the gap between people, physicians and health systems, enabling everyone, especially symptomatic patients, to stay at home and communicate with physicians through virtual channels. It guided everyone on the availability of oxygen, medicine and other necessities. Later she talked about the dark side of digitalisation where many people do not have access to smartphones and the real challenge was to collect data of those people. Talking about children she said that it was necessary to keep them engaged digitally but it could not happen for all. She welcomed digitalization but expressed grief about the digital divide as 60% women don't have smartphones, computers or net connectivity. There is a strong need to accommodate building and other construction workers online. Many times government portals are slow and so workers are not able to register online as they face problems due to change of their phone number whose OTP is required. She concluded by noting that workers should not be deprived of social security and there should be free internet to provide job training.

**Ms. Harsh** (*Deputy Director, CII*) has given an industrial perspective to the content and said that the ongoing success could not be possible in the absence of digital literacy. Digital literacy is important in all kinds of jobs and it is most important for achieving Sustainable Goals. With time we have learnt how to utilise smartphones and then the use of various applications like Ola, Uber, and use of various E-commerce platforms made life easier and this can also be seen from the future job perspectives. Today the industry is looking forward to common skills like interpersonal skills/communication skills, critical thinking, agile learning (how fast youth can learn) and self promotion which are required to hire first and it takes care of technical skills later. Goa and Kerala have 70% digital literacy rate but the area of concern is Rural India where 20% of rural sector do not have digital reach and states like Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, MP where digital literacy is below 30%. She added gender divide in digital divide and explained the status of

women who don't have access to smartphones. Since technology is changing, job roles are also changing. All education and vocational training has gone online but all government training has very less hour sessions which need to be increased. The training must be in tech for a job role and must be linked to the industry's technology.

**Sh. Arvind Francis** (*Secretary General, FICCI*) explained the vision of **Digital India** programme and its journey since launch to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The programme was to ensure all the advantages should be available to all sections of society but multiple lockdowns changed people's lifestyle and most of the people have gone digital. He talked about digital reset and the use of digital tools during the COVID-19 crisis. He also stressed on the importance of digital literacy for youth especially in education. India has become second Ed-tech after the US and the market size for EdTech in India is projected to reach USD 3.2 billion by 2022 and USD 10.4 billion by 2025. Due to the pandemic there has been phenomenal growth of online educational platforms at low cost and the government has also launched various e-learning projects like SWAYAM, Swayam Prabha, DIKSHA, etc. He also said that the ongoing digital transformation in various organisations is a part of industrial revolution 4.0 and the Work From Home model shifted to a more sustainable model hybrid model. He explained 3 stages of digitalisation -- Digital competence, Digital usage, and Digital transformation. Referring to industries he said that organisations not only look towards employing those who have only expertise in areas of speciality but also work in edtech and digital skill is vital. Talking about digital divide he said that everyone cannot afford basic access to the internet as tech has not reached remote areas. Lack of digital literacy is prevalent in workers working in the informal sector. The online courses offered are of poor quality and it requires high speed internet which is not available everywhere. He said that one has to draw a fine line while going digital as lack of awareness can be destructive. He had mixed feelings about going digital and said that overall we are on the right path but a long way to go.

**Ms. Lata Gautam** (*Director-NCS, under the DG of Employment, MoLE*) : She explained her positive experience of going digital during the pandemic, how digital meetings of employers and employees eased everything which could not happen due to restrictions. The digital process has saved time and energy and we can attend many programmes. Due to digitalisation we have reached maximum people as offline employment exchange was a delayed process. Later she explained some handy information about the online portal <https://www.ncs.gov.in/> where all job seekers, employers and children can register themselves to avail benefits. More than 98 lakh jobseekers have registered on this portal and there are more than 1.5 lakh active employers who can be approached for a job. Children can hair their counsellors for career information who guide students properly to have good career options. The NCS has organised various online job fairs and in order to address the skill gap it has hired private organisations to give skills to jobseekers as 90% jobseekers fail because they do not express themselves well or do not have required s kills. At last she has urged everyone to spread awareness about the portal otherwise it will not be useful if it doesn't reach the grassroot level.

**Prof. Santosh Mehrotra** (*Visiting Prof. University of Bath, UK; Ex-Prof. JNU*) was in agreement with the previous speakers about the improvement in digitalization. He connected

digital literacy with MSME, social security and minimum income guarantee and suggested how to improve further. Quoting NSS data he said that 64 million units in the non-farm sector are unorganised and they are victims of digital divide as they are not capable of carrying smartphones. Talking about the impact of COVID on them and social security code he said that we have to talk about digital registration which is in question as most of the common service centers are not in running condition. To reduce digital divide the government has to think and apart from this if we want to provide social security to them Trade Unions have a big role to play who have to raise their voice strongly to register all workers. There was an adverse impact of COVID on unorganised sector workers due to job loss and job shift. If we want to revive exclusively then aggregate demand needs to increase and for this minimum income guarantee is required. The government has initiated such schemes like PM-KISAN which is not sufficient as it covers only rural areas and tenant and landless farmers have been excluded in this. Today 60% people in India need at least Rs500/month which will automatically boost aggregate demand. Cash transfer schemes work only when all workers have a bank account but today lakhs or crores of workers do not own a bank account. The need of the hour is to reduce digital divide and increase digital literacy. The government must use digital surveys to identify the poors so that they can be reached easily.

Mr. Mehrotra discussed the importance of digital literacy not only in terms of present needs but also in terms of future. He added that the largely discussed and debated minimum income scheme or universal basic income will see success only if people are well aware about digital technology.

**Sh. Sultan Ahmed** ( *Head of Bureau of Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), ILO*) compared the pre-digitalization era with today's scenario. He said that today digital education is compulsory just like a primary level education. He also explained the role of digitalisation in connecting society and individuals and in employment relations. Later he explained ILO's initiatives to address the condition of workers who became jobless due to the pandemic. He talked about digital necessity and said that we got a digital tool but we should also know about the danger of it. He also urged the need to set up an E-academy to reach and teach workers and we need a tripartite body who can support and participate in government in making the best use of digital tools.

**SHRI HIRANMAY PANDYA**, Chair for the session and Chairman, DTF concluded the session with his remarks on the importance of digital literacy in the post-COVID era. He congratulated the DTF team for the successful organisation of the event.

**SHRI VIRJESH UPADHYAY PROPOSED THE VOTE OF THANKS**

**SHRI HIRANMAY PANDYA ANNOUNCED THE FORMAL END OF THE SESSION.**