

# Digital Empowerment Foundation to train 100 women entrepreneurs

Digital Empowerment Foundation seeks to identify and train women entrepreneurs who can eventually set up rural information enterprise units

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Between 2016 and 2019, DEF's digital entrepreneurs are expected to serve 350,000 individuals. Photo: Hemant Mishra/Mint

**New Delhi:** New Delhi-based not-for-profit Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) plans to train 100 women in digital entrepreneurship over the next one year.

The organisation, through its rural wireless information entrepreneurship programme *SoochnaPreneur*, seeks to identify and train entrepreneurs who can eventually set up rural information enterprise units (Soochna Seva Kendras/Information Service Centres).

The programme addresses the need for digital and development inclusion with information and communication based tools, devices, content,

platforms, and services. Founded in 2002, DEF has already trained 100 such entrepreneurs in the last one year.

“Over the next five years, we want to reach each and every backward district of the country. There are 272 backward districts in the country, in which there are almost 3,000 blocks. And we want to reach all 3,000 blocks,” said Osama Manzar, founder and director of DEF, on the sidelines of a panel discussion organised to celebrate one year of *SoochnaPreneur*, in partnership with the Office of the European Union Delegation in India, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and handset chip manufacturer Qualcomm Inc.

The idea behind the programme, Manzar said, is to commoditize information in “such a way that it becomes a product of entrepreneurship and enterprise-ship. Information needs of the masses have not been met properly. This (*SoochnaPreneur*) is a very unique programme to create entrepreneurship at a rural level, playing on pure information. With the increasing connectivity, there is a need and demand for information in rural India,” he added.

Between 2016 and 2019, DEF’s digital entrepreneurs are expected to serve 350,000 individuals with government scheme entitlements, information and digital services through 100 digitally-equipped service centres across the country. These entrepreneurs are also equipped with a mobile application called ‘MeraApp’ which provides information on government schemes and entitlements to rural communities.

“A lot of people in India are still unconnected in India. There are electricity issues in rural areas; there is a lack of access to information. Because of this, people are being kept away from their entitlements and necessities,” said Manzar, adding that there is a need to build and sustain information entrepreneurs and enterprises.

DEF, in its initiative *SoochnaPreneur*, is supported by Qualcomm India. “Our mission is technology innovation. We are completely dedicated to grow the wireless industry by investing in the development and research and then taking and sharing those investments and outputs in a business and social way (in case of DEF),” said Larry Paulson, vice-president and president at Qualcomm India, in his keynote address.

*Mint has a strategic partnership with Digital Empowerment Foundation, which hosts the Manthan and mBillionth awards.*

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