



## Building an Ethical, Inclusive, and Community-Centered Approach to Accessible Digital Health through AI

*Harnessing Technologies in an Age of AI to Build a Healthier World*

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## Prioritising Underserved Communities in the Digital Health Landscape

- ⑥ Global disparities in AI and digital technology continue to exclude marginalized communities, exacerbating the digital health gap, especially in Global South
- ⑥ Examine case studies and initiatives that address AI accessibility, fairness, and representation in the last mile.
- ⑥ Collaboration between experts and communities to create just, ethical and equitable AI systems tailored to address the needs of hyperlocal settings.
- ⑥ Navigating the AI landscape within the context of an existing and continuously widening digital divide.

**DEF has been asking these critical questions to ensure that technology serves the needs of the most vulnerable in society:**

- ⑥ How can AI be developed and used to benefit marginalized communities while avoiding exploitation and harm?
- ⑥ How can AI systems be designed to be inclusive and address the needs of rural and underserved communities in India?
- ⑥ What safeguards can be put in place to prevent the displacement or exploitation of frontline workers, especially in low-wage, gig, or platform economies?

**HOW CAN WE DEVELOP AI-DRIVEN DIGITAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS THAT ARE COMMUNITY-INFORMED, BRIDGE THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE, AND PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY, FAIRNESS, AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING?**



## The Paradox of Digital India: Where is “We” in AI?

### 🌀 India’s Digital Landscape:

- Over 650 million smartphone users
- 950 million internet subscribers
- A global leader in the digital econo

### 🌀 The Reality of Disconnection:

- Despite progress, large sections of the population remain unconnected, deepening the social divide.
- Rural India: Only 24% have internet access.
- Urban India: 66% have internet access (NSSO, 2024).

### 🌀 Growing Disparity:

- The gap between rural and urban access is widening.
- Oxfam’s Inequality Report 2022 highlights:  
31% of rural households have internet access, compared to 67% in urban areas

### 🌀 Challenges in AI Accessibility:

- Limited digital literacy and infrastructure in rural areas.
- Underrepresentation of marginalized communities in AI datasets.
- Algorithmic biases reinforcing social inequalities.



**KEY QUESTION: HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND ENSURE THAT AI BENEFITS ALL OF INDIA, REGARDLESS OF GEOGRAPHY OR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS?**

## The Indian Context - Rural AI Divide

### Barriers to AI Adoption in Rural India:

- 65% of India's population lacks meaningful engagement with AI and digital tools.
- Algorithmic decisions in welfare schemes exclude marginalized groups (e.g., Aadhaar-related denials).
- Limited AI literacy among community stakeholders (Panchayat leaders, SHGs, youth, etc.).

### AI for All Literacy Program - A Case Study

- Initiative: AI literacy & mobilization across 14 states.
- Participants: Panchayat leaders, ASHA workers, students, SHGs, and youth.
- Key Learnings:
  - 72% of participants had no prior understanding of AI.
  - Increased awareness of AI's impact on governance, misinformation, and rights.
- Measure of Impact: Strengthening local decision-makers' capacity to participate as key stakeholders and engage with AI policies



HOW CAN WE SCALE AI LITERACY INITIATIVES LIKE THE *AI FOR ALL LITERACY PROGRAM 2023* TO ENSURE GREATER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND BRIDGE THE RURAL AI DIVIDE?

## DEF's Just AI - Data & Algorithms for Communities

**Our Mission:** Bridging the gap between AI and social justice through literacy, advocacy, and innovation.

**Approach:** Community-driven digital literacy, participatory research, and citizen-centric AI frameworks.

**Focus Areas:**

- AI literacy & capacity building
- Grassroots research on AI access & biases
- Fact-checking & misinformation combat
- Ethical AI solutions recognition
- AI governance & policy advocacy

### ONGOING EFFORTS

**Algorithmic Chronicles:** Documenting AI injustices across languages.

**SheCatalyst Program:** Training women-led CIRCs as rural fact-checkers.

**Just AI Awards 2025:** Recognizing ethical AI innovations for social good.

**AI Governance Anthology:** Exploring AI's implications on policy, society, and inclusion.

**Framework for Community-Informed Responsible AI:** A governance & accessibility model.



**HOW CAN WE COLLECTIVELY ENSURE THAT AI SERVES AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION, RATHER THAN PERPETUATING INEQUALITIES?**



## Policy & Advocacy – Are we asking the Right Questions?

- What are the gaps in data representation, algorithmic fairness, and transparency?
- How can governments, academia, and communities co-design AI governance frameworks?
- How do we scale localized AI solutions for underserved communities?
- What mechanisms ensure AI accountability & human rights safeguards?
- How can AI be leveraged to create a citizen-centric digital model that prioritizes
- inclusion, social justice, and human dignity?

### Key Focus Areas:

**Data, Power & Justice** – Examine how data governance, AI, and surveillance impact democracy, rights, and marginalized communities.

**Digital & Social Justice** – Address algorithmic bias, digital exclusion, and policy gaps to ensure ethical and inclusive AI.

**Data & AI Literacy** – Empower citizens with knowledge on data privacy, AI ethics, and community-driven digital governance.

**Data Sovereignty & Rights** – Advocate for policies that protect digital autonomy and prevent AI-driven discrimination.

**Multi-stakeholder Collaboration** – Engage policymakers, technologists, and civil society to co-create ethical AI solutions.

**Reimagining Digital Economies** – Explore community-driven data economies, platform cooperatives, and decentralized AI models.

**AI & Digital Health Access** – Harness AI to improve equitable healthcare access, ensuring inclusivity, affordability, and ethical safeguards.

**ONWARDS TO 7TH DIGITAL  
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PEOPLE OF INDIA**



# Thank You!



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