

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Reliance Foundation and the U.S. Mission to India Collaborate to Advance Women's Participation in Digital Economy**

- *Reliance Foundation commits USD \$10 million to the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF), a joint effort by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)*
- *Reliance Foundation's commitment as a global anchor partner to WiDEF will double the consortium's funding for innovative projects in India*
- *Reliance Foundation and USAID will help accelerate progress to close the gender digital divide and share best practices from India for the Global South*

**Mumbai, September 21, 2024:** In a move to significantly close the gender digital divide in India, Reliance Foundation will provide up to \$10 million to the Women in Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF), a joint effort by USAID and BMGF.

[Announced by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris in March 2023](#), WiDEF aims to improve women's livelihoods, enhance economic security, and strengthen resilience, by identifying, funding and advancing effective solutions for women's economic empowerment. WiDEF in India is a joint effort between USAID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Reliance Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF in India is managed by the GSMA Foundation with support from the global WiDEF managing consortium.

Reliance Foundation's support will double the available WiDEF funding in India and support the 2023 G20 Leaders commitment under India's presidency to halve the digital gender gap by 2030. Additionally, Reliance Foundation will support learning through development of knowledge products, dissemination of promising practices and other tools, and bolster measurement and learning for all India grantees.

*"The Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) is a historic step for global collaboration to achieve the G20 commitment to close the gender digital divide by 2030 and Reliance Foundation is proud to come on board as a Global Anchor Partner," said **Ms. Isha Ambani, Director, Reliance Foundation**. "We are committed to increasing our efforts to advance digital inclusion to improve women's livelihoods, economic security and resilience. Through WiDEF, Reliance Foundation will work together to accelerate innovative solutions to empower women through technology in India and also share best practices with other countries to help drive global progress towards this shared vision for a more equitable future."*

**USAID/India Acting Mission Director Dr. Alexandria Huerta**, said, *"As the United States and India partner to advance and achieve global development goals, closing the gender digital divide is essential to progress in India and around the world. USAID is proud to partner with Reliance Foundation through the Women in the Digital Economy Fund to accelerate women's economic empowerment. Building on our longstanding partnership and impactful results, USAID and Reliance Foundation aim to empower millions of women across India, ensuring that the benefits of the digital economy are accessible to all and fostering a more equitable future."*

This partnership builds on Reliance Foundation and USAID's collaboration on WomenConnect Challenge India. The WomenConnect Challenge is USAID's global call for solutions to improve women's participation in everyday life by meaningfully changing the ways women access and use technology. USAID and Reliance Foundation created the USAID and Reliance Foundation WomenConnect Challenge India in 2020 to help bridge the gender digital divide for 600,000 women across the subcontinent. The initiative has selected 17 awardees across two rounds, focusing on innovative and culturally contextual solutions to bridge the gender digital divide. The awardees were selected based on criteria that emphasized the ability to effectively dismantle barriers, ensure equitable access, and digitally empower women from marginalized communities through innovative solutions.

In India, Reliance Foundation is also working together with BMGF to empower one million women entrepreneurs in several states of India. In addition, Reliance Foundation is supporting Reliance Jio and GSMA on a national roll-out of their Digital Skills Program, under the broader GSMA Connected Women Commitment initiative which aims to provide training to rural women and individuals from marginalized communities to help them make meaningful use of digital access.

Similarly, the U.S. Government prioritizes the advancement of women's economic empowerment and digital inclusion in India and across the globe. USAID is also facilitating opportunities for women entrepreneurs to build their digital skills, including in digital financial literacy, which accelerates their participation in the formal economy. USAID has applied best practices from India throughout the South Asia region, including improving digital skills for over 16,000 women entrepreneurs to grow and sustain their businesses digitally through the South Asia Regional Digital Initiative.

Since its launch in March 2023, the Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) has several strongly committed partners in the global consortium, in addition to Reliance Foundation, USAID and BMGF. This includes governments, private sector companies, foundations, civil society, and multilateral organizations. Together the partners have pledged more than \$1.01 billion to accelerate gender digital equality.

#### **About Reliance Foundation:**

Reliance Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries Limited, aims to play a catalytic role in addressing India's development challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions. Led by Smt. Nita M Ambani, Founder and Chairperson, Reliance Foundation is relentlessly working for the overall well-being and enhanced quality of life for all, focusing on rural transformation, education, health, sports for development, disaster management, women empowerment, urban renewal and arts, culture and heritage, and has touched the lives of over 77 million people across India, in over 55,550 villages and urban locations. More on [www.reliancefoundation.org](http://www.reliancefoundation.org)

#### **About USAID:**

USAID is the U.S. Government's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID works to help lift lives, build communities, and advance democracy. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity; demonstrates American generosity; and helps countries progress along their development journey. In India, USAID is collaborating with the country's growing human and financial resources through partnerships that catalyze innovation and entrepreneurship to solve critical local and global development challenges. To learn more, visit [www.usaid.gov/india](http://www.usaid.gov/india)

**About WiDEF:**

The Women in the Digital Economy Fund (WiDEF) in India is a joint effort between USAID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Reliance Foundation to accelerate progress on closing the gender digital divide. WiDEF identifies, directly funds, and advances investment in proven solutions to close the gender digital divide, improving women’s livelihoods, economic security, and resilience. WiDEF in India is managed by the GSMA Foundation with support from the global WiDEF managing consortium. Learn more at: <https://widedf.global>