

MEDIA RELEASE

Reliance Foundation, USAID announce winners of the WomenConnect Challenge India Round Two to close the gender digital divide

Mumbai, May 24, 2023: Reliance Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced today the grant winners of Round Two of the WomenConnect Challenge India, which aims to close the gender digital divide in India and enable women to fully participate in the global economy.

Seven social sector organizations were selected out of more than 260 applicants for an award of up to INR 1 crore each (approximately \$120,000) in grants from Reliance Foundation, to address barriers that limit women's access to technology. The United States government partnered with Reliance Foundation to reach and support women entrepreneurs, farmers, women-led micro enterprises and collectives, and self-help groups to provide mentoring support from experts and practitioners across India.

The winners were announced on Wednesday at an event 'Accelerating Digital Inclusion: Bridging the Gender Digital Divide in India' that brought together key experts and organizations.

Speaking at the event, Veena Reddy, USAID/India Mission Director, said, "The United States recognizes the strategic importance of a connected world. USAID works towards a future where digital technology promotes inclusive growth, fosters resilient and democratic societies, and empowers all, including the most vulnerable. USAID is excited to be building on the success of Round One of the WomenConnect Challenge India. Round Two projects will accelerate progress to bridge the digital gap by expanding access to digital tools, specialized training, and business opportunities."

Jagannatha Kumar, Chief Executive Officer, Reliance Foundation, said, "We are committed to working to close the gender digital divide because we believe India's digital revolution provides immense potential for women led development. We saw this through the innovative approaches to digital inclusion that were incubated in Round One of the WomenConnect Challenge India. We saw women thrive with enhanced livelihood, entrepreneurship and learning opportunities when they were able to access the benefits that digital empowerment provides. Through WomenConnect Challenge India Round Two, Reliance Foundation in partnership with USAID aims to build on the momentum generated, to positively impact over 350,000 women and their communities."

The winners of Round Two are:

- **The Goat Trust**, which will build digital skills of community livestock care providers who provide business services to women livestock farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Assam.
- **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation**, which will build capacity of women collectives in post-harvest fisheries on a range of ICT technologies and innovations in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry.
- **Manjari Foundation**, which will train rural women from women collectives on digital literacy, usage of digital services, and promote entrepreneurship opportunities in Rajasthan.
- **Digital Empowerment Foundation**, which will train and facilitate access to digital connectivity and services for women in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand.
- **Seven Sisters Development Assistance**, which will promote use of technology among women self-help groups and adolescent girls from indigent and marginalized families in Assam.

- **ACCESS Development Services**, which will provide app-based training to women entrepreneurs in Rajasthan.
- **Yugantar**, which will promote financial and digital inclusion through games, videos and other interactive tools in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

During the roundtable, Reliance Foundation and USAID released their first joint publication from WomenConnect Challenge India, titled 'Women Connected: Strategies for Bridging the Gender Digital Divide in India' summarizing their learnings. Through Round One of the Challenge, which began in August 2021, 10 organizations implemented solutions in 19 Indian states benefiting over 320,000 women and girls.

The publication highlights the significance of behavioral change campaigns and collaboration with community leaders and family members in promoting digital inclusion. It also reinforces the need to incorporate digital literacy into livelihood programs as a crucial element for bridging the gender digital divide in India. WomenConnect Challenge India is an example of how women's role in the design and development of digital technology guarantees their distinct needs and perspectives are duly considered, especially at grassroots level.

The WomenConnect Challenge is a global call for solutions to improve women's participation in everyday life by meaningfully changing the ways women access and use technology. Through the collaboration, Reliance Foundation and USAID are supporting new pathways for women and girls in India to engage with technology, counter outdated social norms, and increase their economic independence. Ultimately, closing the gender digital divide will help women improve their lives, the stability of their families, and the resilience of their communities, fostering an inclusive and more equitable future.

To learn more about WomenConnect Challenge India, visit: www.womenconnectindia.com

About the Organizations:

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 Ambani, Founder and Chairperson, Reliance Foundation is relentlessly working to facilitate transformative changes for the overall wellbeing and better quality of life for all. Reliance Foundation focuses on rural transformation, education, health, sports for development, women empowerment, disaster management, urban renewal and arts, culture and heritage, and has touched the lives of over 69.5 million people across India, in more than 54,200 villages and several urban locations. For more information, please visit www.reliancefoundation.org*

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID): *USAID, an agency of the United States government and working throughout India, is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID works to help lift lives, build communities, advance democracy, and champions the cause of women empowerment across the globe. 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*