Making Digital India a reality

Intel India's 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur' aims to deliver digital literacy, financial inclusion and healthcare services to rural areas
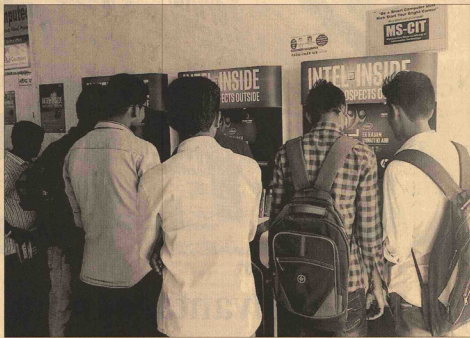
Sudhir Chowdhary

NOT long ago, Narendra Modi government announced its ambitious Digital India programme, which aims to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. There have been many views on whether it is showing results or not. The US chipmaker Intel believes that massive transformation projects, such as Digital India, cannot happen in a day, but they have to be undertaken and a strong public private partnership is key for success. Debjani Ghosh, vice-president, Sales and Marketing Group & managing director, Intel South Asia, says, "Our goal is to be a part of the change, to contribute however we can to accelerate the successful realisation of Digital India. As said by Mahatma Gandhi, you have to be the change you want to see."

Two years ago, when Digital India was announced, the Intel MD recalls a conversation she was having with the minister of communications and IT. "He said that if we really want to make a difference, we should think beyond urban, and work at the grassroots level. To him, the day women in rural India are empowered to be financially independent, will be the day that Digital India is successful."

This is what planted the seed for Intel India's 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur' initiative, launched last year by the minister himself. "The programme is a part of our nationwide plan to create a blueprint for the digitisation of non-urban India," she adds.

As part of 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur' programme, Intel India has worked with five state governments, over a period of two months to set up 'Unnati Kendras' across 40 common service centres (CSCs). The pilot kicked off in 10 districts of the tech-savvy Telangana, and subsequently extended to Haryana, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra over the last month. This initiative is at the core of Intel India's charter this year, and beyond. "In India, the biggest challenge is the lack of technology relevance and know-how, especially in the non-urban regions, where the next generation of technology users are. To advance the domestic consumption of technology in India, you have to increase its relevance and use it to solve real life challenges, and that is our biggest focus in the country. Till we don't help people realise how technology can help them, any effort to grow technology adoption and usage will be futile," opines Debjani.

Each Unnati Kendra has been equipped with Intel powered devices, local language content, and relevant training modules to create opportunities for skill development and digital empowerment. The centres will also be used as platforms to deliver digital literacy, financial inclusion, and healthcare services to citizens, providing them with comprehensive access to basic services that improve their lives. According to the data being tracked by Intel India, approximately 50,000 local citizens have already visited the Unnati Kendras in less than two months since their inauguration. The company aims to open upto 60 more centres in six more states by the end of this year.

While the impact is already starting to show, Debjani also highlights that there have been some key learnings for Intel during the process. "As the minister had rightly said, women are the early adopters in these new markets that we are creating. They want to know how computing can help their livelihood, as well as improve education and employment prospects for their children. Once they have experienced technology, and are convinced about its power to impact their lives, these women become the change agents and have real commitment to increase accessibility of technology for their families."

According to the Intel MD for South

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DEBJANI GHOSH, vice-president, Sales & Marketing Group & MD, Intel South Asia

Asia region, several young people and students also walk into these centres to find opportunities for a brighter future, whether through employment or entrepreneurship opportunities. As per the village level entrepreneurs (VLEs) running these CSCs, there is also a strong desire to own devices (including PC) once

EXPANDING DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Name of programme:
Intel Digital Literacy Programme

Objective:
Skills development and capacity building

Achievements:
- ▶ **80+ lakh Indian** citizens reached
- ▶ **3+ lakh students** impacted under the Intel Higher Education Programme
- ▶ **18+ lakh teachers** reached under the Intel Teach Programme

Name of programme:
Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur

Objective:
Empowering non-urban citizens

Achievements:
- ▶ Grassroots transformation in **10 states**
- ▶ Target of **50+ million** reach in 2016
- ▶ Target of **100 Unnati Kendras** in 2016

the usage and benefits are clear and Intel is working with its ecosystem partners to enable the same. This is also creating more income generation opportunities for the VLEs.

It's not just Intel that is talking about 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur'. For Sandeep Panwar, the village level entrepreneur who runs the Unnati Kendra in Karnal, this is a way to give back to his community. "I am from Karnal, and after spending many years as an engineer in Delhi, I wanted to come back home, and do more for my own people. It's been just about a month since we opened the centre in Karnal, and the response has been overwhelming. More than a 100 people visit every day. It has been a mutual learning process for both—the local citizens who visit, and for me. On one hand, I can show and tell on a big screen, to my customers here, how to check their bank accounts, emails, and more; I am their go-to-person for technology related questions. On the other hand; I have access to trainings and technology-based information from Intel and the government to upskill myself," he said.

For K Pavitra, who runs the Unnati Kendra in Ibrahimpatnam, Ranga Reddy district of Telangana, it has been a life changing experience. "I was a housewife, but very determined to do something

that can impact lives beyond my family. When this Unnati Kendra was set up in our district, I wanted to be involved in some way. Today, I am leading this centre, and training men, women, and children on how to use a computer, the internet, and educating them on how these technologies can change lives. The Intel team is supportive, and helping me realise my dream," she said.

Public private collaboration is at the heart of realising the Digital India dream, and what is needed is a groundsup approach to increase relevance. Debjani echoes this thought, saying "We want to ensure that technology is solving real life challenges that citizens face. We are also facilitating this through initiatives such as Intel and DST—Innovate for Digital India Challenge, which was created to attract aspiring and existing makers, entrepreneurs and innovators to develop intuitive, easy-to-use solutions to drive technology adoption and address real challenges in India. In addition, Intel India is also working with local players to create solutions customised for India. One example is Datamini's Janunnati Pad, powered by Intel, that comes integrated with a STQC-certified fingerprint scanner for Aadhaar authentication, and can be used to help in the implementation of key e-governance initiatives such as DBT (Direct Benefits Transfer)."

This initiative by Intel India is not just based on intuition, but on hard facts, one being that only 20% of the Indian population has access to computing, revealing the limited computing penetration in our country. In 2012, Intel had launched the National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) together with Nasscom, Dell, Lenovo, Microsoft and NIIT among others, to facilitate the government's vision to make at least one person per household e-literate by 2020. Today, this Mission had been adopted by the Central government, and aims to impart IT training to 52.5 lakh persons.

Intel hopes that over the coming year, the government will adopt a similar approach towards 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur', to accelerate the penetration of technology relevance to other states. "At the end of 2016, we will document the impact of 'Ek Kadam Unnati Ki Aur'. It will be critical to see the impact that technology has on improving lives and how that can be scaled. We believe that CSCs are the bridge to help achieve this scalability, as they take technology to non-urban India. For anyone who wants to see how Digital India is taking shape, it's time to step out of the big cities, and watch the programme change lives at the grassroots level. That is where it really matters," concludes Debjani.