INTERNET ROSHNI

BUILDING
OPPORTUNITIES,
LEVERAGING
TECHNOLOGY
(BOLT)

Digital Empowerment of Tea Tribe & Adivasis in Assam

Connectivity | Access | Information | Empowerment

2022-2023

CONTENT

The Context

- The population of Tea Tribe & Adivasi community is estimated to be around 7 million (70 lakhs) or nearly 20% of the total population in Assam (2011 Census).

- The community, especially the younger generation, has been facing challenges in accessing better education, livelihood, skills and opportunities.

- The community still have social-cultural-economic identity challenges to overcome and their mainstreaming with mainland communities, institutions are still distant goals.

Location of Major Tea Gardens in Assam

The Access Challenges

- The **community faces key access challenges** – Access to information, schemes, entitlements, services, skills, alternative livelihood, newer opportunities.

- In this fast developing **21st century, digitalization** has become the utmost priority and the newest trend.

- The recent **COVID pandemic** added new dimensions to the paradigm shift from a **"Manual World" to "Digitalized World"**.

- The **Tea Tribe and Adivasi community** already facing economic and social exclusion, now faces a new exclusion: - **The Digital Exclusion.**

- **Meaningful digital access in connectivity, information and services, and digitalization has become a living necessity, is a major access challenge for the community.**
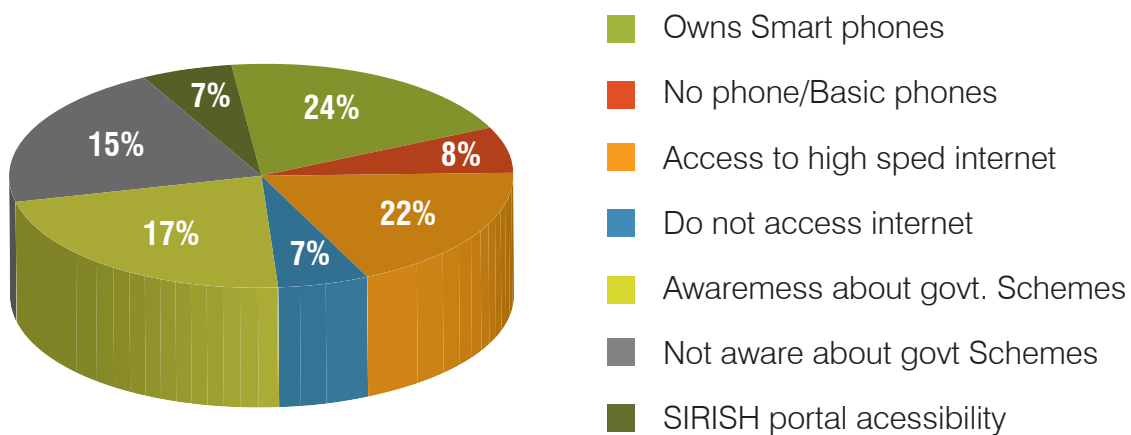
A study (2021-2022) conducted in 5 districts of Assam in Cachar, Dibrugarh, Hailakandi, Jorhat and Tinsukia on connectivity and access in the community highlighted:

- 56% owned smart phone, but no meaningful access, and 44% either had no phone or owned basic phone.

- 59% had reasonable access to internet speed and about 41% did not have access to good internet speed.

- 53% were aware of some government schemes and 46% were not aware of any specific schemes for them.

- Only 22% were aware of the Tea Tribe Department SIRISH portal, launched by the Tea Tribe Welfare Department of Assam for the community, and have availed some benefits from the portal, especially scholarships.

Digital Accessibility in a Tea Garden Community

- Owns Smart phones
- No phone/Basic phones
- Access to high sped internet
- Do not access internet
- Awaremess about govt. Schemes
- Not aware about govt Schemes
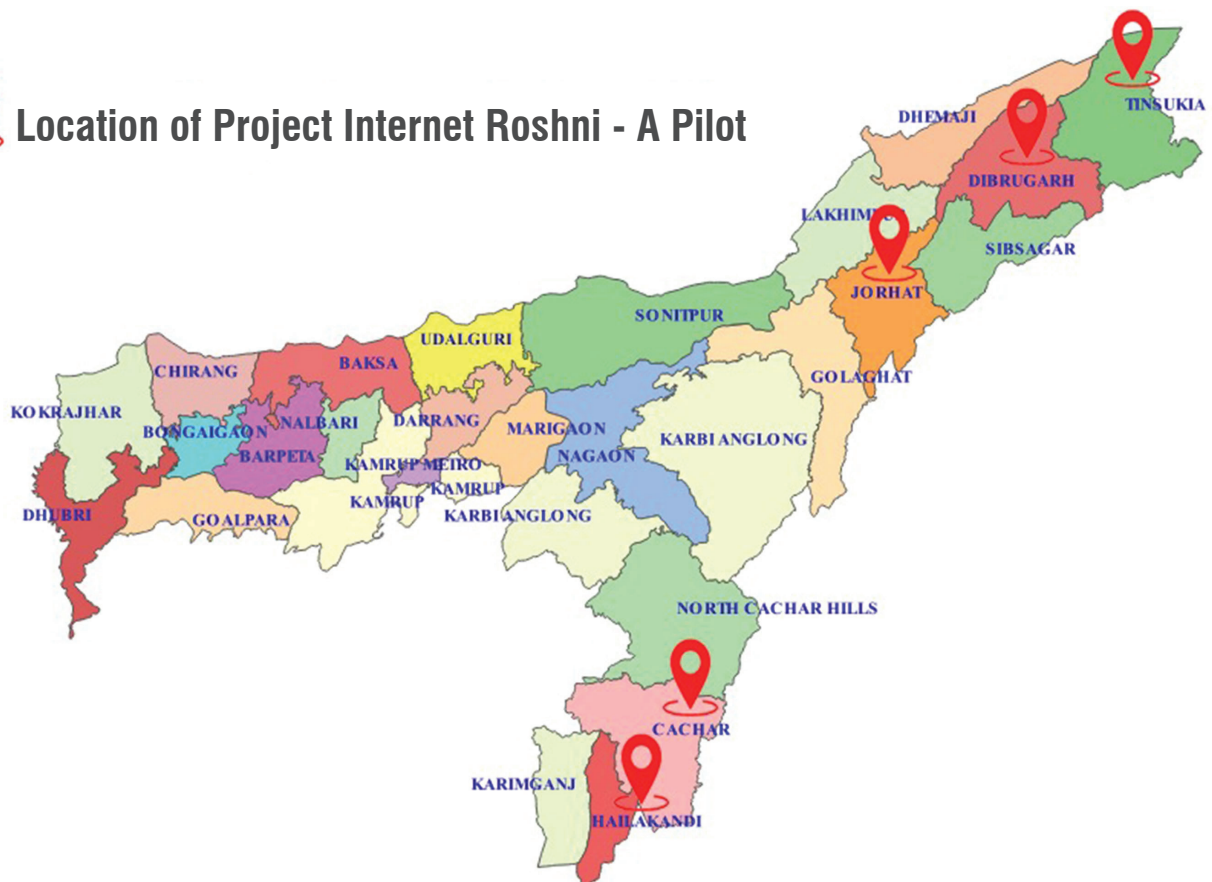- SIRISH portal acessibility

7% 24% 8% 22% 7% 17% 15%

Internet Roshni – A Pilot [2022-2023]

- Given the remoteness of the gardens and the specificity of the terrain, the Tea Tribe & Adivasis of the Tea Garden regions and areas are facing one of the lowest access and digital coverage.

- Further, due to high cost of setting up infrastructure for internet services, the tea garden and surrounding regions are low interest areas for the telecom and internet service providers.

- Due to adverse social and economic conditions of the community, even community network solutions are difficult due to cost and sustainability.

- The only way to address this internet vulnerability without delay is leveraging existing limited mobile data networks in the garden, data boosted by booster devices and channelling in concentrated Community Internet libraries (CILs) with access to network, information and resources.

Location of Project Internet Roshni - A Pilot

Through the Building Opportunity, Leveraging Technology (BOLT) Project 'Internet Roshni', the following were assessed and tested:

- **Improved Access to connectivity and network in tea gardens through 50 Community Internet Libraries (CILs) in 5 districts of Assam.**

- **Meaningful connectivity and access to internet** through enhanced mobile data network channelled through Community Internet libraries.

- **Digital and Financial Literacy Mission for Tea Tribe (DFLM-TT).**

- **Internet skills for empowerment** through basic internet skills to explore, navigate meaningfully and beneficially.

- **Improved and enabled access to Critical Public Schemes Information and Entitlements including digitally.**

Addressing the Access Challenges

Connectivity:

- The Community Internet Libraries (CILs) equipped with a receiving device (Mikrotik SXT LTE Kit) with a WI-FI modem connected to it.

- The receiver device receives the internet and the WI-FI modem, which is connected to the receiver distributes the internet to the users.

- The coverage of the modem is 200 meters in open areas and is configured in such a way that it creates HOTSPOT zones.

Information Access:

- The community Internet Libraries (CILs) run by 50 community information entrepreneurs (Soochnapreneurs) and equipped with digital tools and equipment.

- The Soochnapreneurs regularly trained and updated in all aspect of digital information who in return disseminates the information to the community through WhatsApp groups, workshops, community gatherings.
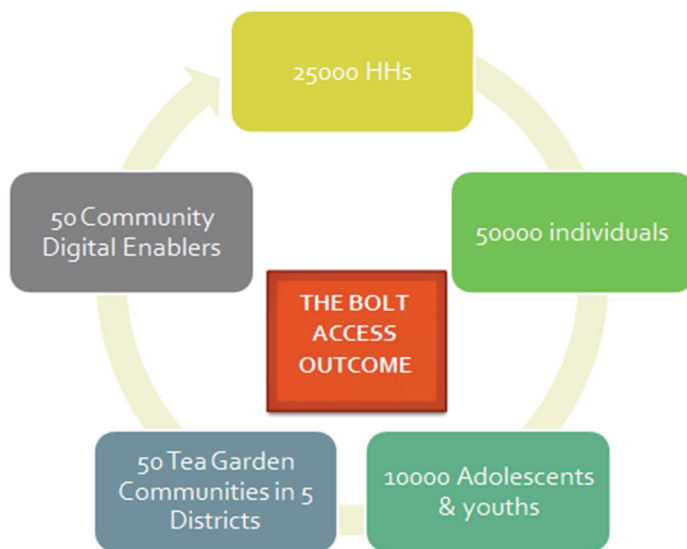
Access to digital services:

- The community accessing the CILs at any point of time inside the garden for availing digital services at very minimum rates as compared to other digital centres.

Access to public schemes:

- The Soochnapreneurs (SPs) regularly given updates about the current running public schemes.

- They organising sensitization camps where the community is made aware of the current schemes and are encouraged to take the maximum benefits of the schemes.

- They closely monitoring the statutory documents that are needed to avail the schemes and if any of the community member lack any of the documents the SPs assisting them to get the documents.

Access to digital skills:

- The SPs in regular intervals conducting various camps and workshops where the community is educated on digital skills including use of computers and smartphones.

  - The community is empowered through internet skills to explore, navigate meaningfully and beneficially.

25000 HHs

50 Community Digital Enablers

50000 individuals

THE BOLT ACCESS OUTCOME

50 Tea Garden Communities in 5 Districts

10000 Adolescents & youths

The Output & Outcome

From no access to community network access:

- Reaching out **to fifty (50) Tea tribe and Adivasi Communities covering 31 tea tribe and Adivasi Panchayats in 5 districts,** with last mile Internet access to the locals, mostly without smartphones or personal devices.

- This last mile access enabled through the **50 Community Internet Libraries (CIL) set ups within gardens, run and managed by garden youths as Soochnapreneurs (Information Entrepreneurs).**

- The project has enabled access to **13538 community members through 50 access points, also integrated with Prime Minister Wireless Access Network Interface (PM WANI) scheme** of the Government (https://pmwani.gov.in/wani)

Internet skills for empowerment:

Since the community have slow and gradual access to phones, they do not have basic internet skills to explore, navigate meaningfully and beneficially. **The project helped to provide internet skills to 1470 through the CILs and Soochnapreneurs and equip them to have these essential skills.**

Meaningful connectivity and access to internet:

- The enhanced **mobile data network channelled through Community Internet libraries** have made the use of the internet more meaningful for the tea tribe community with access to critical information, public schemes, entitlements.

Digital Access to Critical Public Information and Entitlements:

With most of the processes of availing government benefits have moved online, the project has been able to facilitate availing tea tribe schemes and entitlements for the community, **assist online access to these critical entitlements including schemes and scholarships by the Tea Tribe Welfare Department of Assam government (https://sirishassam.in/) through the mobile network powered CILs at garden levels. The project could reach out to 2982 youths, students, women, and others with access to information, schemes and entitlements.**

Enabling women's access to internet:

The project through the Mobile data network enabled Community Internet Libraries gave young girls and women access to the internet and internet services. **The project reached out to 6037 young girls and women overall with access to information, opportunities, services.**

How we are Succeeding?

- **Internet Roshni (Light) to a dark community and their 'Internet Liberation':** Success in this metric is measured in terms of **50 community network and internet access set up and integrated with PM WANI Scheme, and made available in 50 tea tribe and Adivasi Garden communities through 50 Community Internet Library (CIL) access points** for the locals.

- **Channelising hopes, aspirations, opening up windows of world of opportunities for the students, youths and others:** The **50 CILs have channelised students and youths to SIRISH portal government entitlements (scholarships and others) and other services.** For instance, it has helped to enable 110 students and youths to avail scholarships through SIRISH portal applications and facilitation.

- **Overcoming cost, device challenges for the poor community:** A total **13538 number of community people have accessed the internet and CIL** centre facilities.

- **Internet voice to the voiceless: 50 virtual WhatsApp communities are created through the 50 Soochnapreneurs** to share information, queries, concerns, issues related to entitlements and rights and further engaging Panchayat and district stakeholders. **Messages are broadcasted by the Soochnapreneurs in mostly audio mode in local SADRI dialect.**

- **Environmentally sustainable Access (ESA):** Due to low-cost network infrastructure set up there has been **no negative environmental impacts of the Internet and infrastructure in an otherwise fragile tea garden ecosystem.**

- **Trusted and guided access to the world of Internet:** The local community having ready, regular, trusted, timely access to the critical information, entitlements and facilitated by someone from the community (their own Soochnapreneurs. The CILs have been helpful for the tea plantation labour community and their families to get critical digital services including receiving AADHAR identity documents to get their wages digitally into their account.

The NEXT STEPS & POSSIBILITIES

- **Scope for 'Mission Digital INJOT (Roshni)' for the Tea Tribe & Adivasis** in Assam in all 20 Tea Tribe & Adivasi Districts with focus on connectivity, access, skills and empowerment.

- Possibility of **setting up and recognising Community Internet Libraries (CILs)** and other such facilities as **designated SIRISH Facilitation Centres.**

- Opportunity for wider increased Digital Access.

- Exploring meaningful access to Digital Education.

- Focus programme for **digital and financial literacy for the community.**

- Scope for access to **improved and advanced Digital Skills for Livelihood, Employment and Entrepreneurship.**