



Gram Vaani

In Bihar, India, Mahadalit women are regarded as the poorest, lowest caste. These women are isolated due to cultural barriers, social norms, and rural location; they also face a high risk of rape and sexual harassment by members of upper castes. They are often deprived of social benefits and entitlements, ignored by the mainstream population due to a caste-discriminative mindset. These women therefore lack opportunities, often entering the workforce at a young age in order to meet their basic needs or leaving school after the 5th grade to marry young.

Through a WomenConnect Challenge grant, USAID’s global call to close the gender digital divide, Gram Vaani created a new, free voice-based media platform called Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchan (My Voice My Identity) to help create a space for women’s interaction and education.

As many men were already familiar with Gram Vaani’s well-known interactive community media platform Mobile Vaani, they felt comfortable allowing their wives to access educational content on Meri Awaaz Meri Pehchan.

 The interactive voice response (IVR) platform was designed to help these women overcome typical barriers to technology access such as literacy, cost, or cultural norms.

The platform featured content specifically designed for women, including news, community information, and inspirational stories. The women listened to pre-recorded messages on topics such as financial inclusion, livelihoods, gender rights, sexual and reproductive health, and family planning. In addition, Gram Vaani created a 38-episode drama series based on a fictitious character named Munni, a local girl facing social, cultural, and economic pressures to which the other women might relate.

Gram Vaani conducted more than **1,230 COMMUNITY TRAININGS** on how to use the platform and mobile phones. More than **16,000 UNIQUE LISTENERS** accessed the content.

The platform also featured a verbal chat room for women, creating a safe space for information exchange. Women posted comments, questions, or updates on local news and information, empowering them to voice their opinions and concerns and drive conversations. Many community grievances shared on the platform were addressed by local officials, further encouraging civic engagement.

These isolated, rural women felt empowered to voice their opinions and create meaningful interactions, to gain confidence in technology, and to access resources that helped themselves and their families.