



EPoD India at IFMR

India has a significant gender digital divide, especially for low-income women. Prevailing social and gender norms, especially due to caste and mobility, make it difficult for women to own and use internet-enabled phones.

With a grant from the [WomenConnect Challenge](#), USAID's global call to close the gender digital divide, [EPoD India](#) at KREA University collaborated with the government of the state of Chhattisgarh to change behavior and expand mobile connectivity among rural women.

In conjunction with the local government's distribution of two million smartphones to women, EPoD India launched Mor Awaaz, a corresponding digital education program to teach women how to use the smartphones and access important government services and benefits.



The program sent localized, pre-recorded messages once a week for a year to the phones of more than 10,000 participating women in 180 villages to help engage them with technology. Since a third of women in the state were illiterate, all content was voice-based. The messages, designed to be entertaining, featured lively, relatable dialogue between two female characters, Neetu Didi and Bharti Didi. The women felt that their experiences were reflected in the characters and were interested in the featured issues. The characters discussed topics such as health, education, and welfare services. Some of the most popular calls addressed malaria, family planning, breastfeeding, and menstrual cramps. Mor Awaaz sent more than 450,000 messages in total.



Through the program, women learned about India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, a government workfare program guaranteeing 150 days of paid work. As the messages could help the family financially and featured culturally appropriate content, the husbands of participants were receptive to their wives having phones and listening to messages.



The program also regularly surveyed participants to assess their understanding of the content, available government services, and pressing health issues. The direct feedback helped shape the program content in real-time. The survey results were shared with government partners, giving policymakers relevant, timely, and customized information on women's experiences with programs and services.

Mor Awaaz not only helped women access technology and challenge gender norms but also empowered them by providing vital information that helped improve the livelihoods of their families.