

The Challenge

Awaaz De was founded by Neil Patel and Tapan Parikh, who worked together on assessing the effectiveness of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in driving social outcomes, especially behavioural change in agriculture. The research found that there was an acute lack of access to locally-relevant information at the bottom of the pyramid, and farmers gained manifold from not only receiving information, but also interacting with each other and actively asking questions.

Awaaz De provides a platform that enables delivery and sharing of information through voice, text, app and web-based interfaces. It leverages India's high mobile phone penetration and targets communities that are underserved and difficult-to-reach. This makes it possible to reach out at extremely low costs (i.e. not needing smartphones), for example, as a result of missed calls so that the end-user does not have to pay. Voice-based service delivery circumvents the problem of (lack of) literacy. It also enables data collection at the ground level by administering simple surveys among target populations.

Awaaz De has expanded to several other development areas, primarily education, also community engagement, civic mobilisation, financial inclusion and preventive health.

The Impact

Awaaz De has reached over 600,000 unique end-users, by providing services to 192 clients across 23 states in India. It has also worked in six other countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Ethiopia and Mexico. Its vision is to be the leading technology and service provider in the development sector.

In the field of education, Awaaz De believes that ICT can not only enhance learning experience in the classroom, but can also be leveraged to create mindset change of stakeholders. Awaaz De partnered with the Population Council of India to work with girls, their parents, teachers, and community leaders to promote girls' secondary education through an interactive voice-response system (IVR), raising parents' awareness of the responsibilities of school management committees. When piloted in Teach For India classrooms, the Fellows reported a surge in attendance due to parents receiving automated school-related updates. With Kaivalya Foundation, Awaaz De enabled teacher training programmes. Awaaz De is now working on a USAID-funded Quest Alliance project on school drop-outs in the state of Bihar.

Awaaz De has also worked on health-related interventions that have substantial impact on education. For example, with Sesame Workshop India Trust, it devised a muppet show Galli Galli Sim Sim that aims to tackle the spread of diarrhoea. With UNICEF, it works to send out reminders to new mothers for vaccinations and other medical issues.

Education technology case study

AWAAZ DE

Website: www.awaaz.de

Research

One of the key research studies that led to the formation of Awaaz De was done by IFMR and Harvard Business School¹ to assess the impact of mobile-based services to farmers. The study was a randomised control trial of 1,200 farmers in Gujarat. 400 received the mobile technology service, another 400 received a traditional service (consisting of a once-a-year session), and the remaining 400 served as control group.

Baseline data was collected in June 2011, and endline in August 2013. The study showed great interest among farmers for a service of this kind. 80% of the treatment group had called in an average of 20 times. There was also a clear impact on agricultural decisions resulting in a 26.3% increase in yield of cumin, and 3.5% increase in yield of cotton. This also helped reduce risks of farmers falling prey to middlemen.

It is, however, uncommon for clients to invest in such extensive and costly impact studies. Awaaz De end-user data such as pick-up rate, listening times, and survey results serve as indications of impact. Added to these is a wealth of anecdotal evidence. Any future research needs will focus on measuring behavioural change as a result of Awaaz De solutions in a rigorous unbiased way.



Stakeholders

Awaaz De received seed funding from the Centre for Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneurship (CIIE) at IIM-Ahmedabad. It is registered as a for-profit social enterprise. Major stakeholders are funding organisations such as aid agencies, impact investors and foundations, who need to understand the strong impact that such mobile-based services can create. Awaaz De's interface with the Government is via its non-profit partners, and it believes that it needs to create more bandwidth before engaging with the Government to advocate for policy. Other similar services in the global market include SoukTel and Dimagi, both of which have successful mobile-based interventions for social development.

About

This is a series of case studies produced by HEART for the UK Department for International Development. Programme experts were consulted in the process. Any views and opinions do not necessarily reflect those of DFID or HEART.

¹ http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nileshf/files/ao_paper.pdf