

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **RELIANCE FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES WOMENCONNECT CHALLENGE INDIA GRANTEES**

#### **TEN ORGANIZATIONS FUNDED FOR WOMEN'S TECHNOLOGY EMPOWERMENT**

- **Joint initiative launched by Reliance Foundation and USAID to help identify innovative solutions to close the gender digital divide**
- **Grantees will work across 17 states, reaching 3 lakh (300,000) women and girls**
- **Reliance Foundation is providing Rs 8.5 crore (over \$1.1 million USD) in grants for the WomenConnect Challenge India initiative**

**Mumbai, September 28, 2021:** Ten organizations across India have been selected as grantees through the **WomenConnect Challenge India**, launched by Reliance Foundation and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Through this initiative, over Rs 11 crores (over \$1.5 million USD) has been invested to help close the gender digital divide and of this, Reliance Foundation has supported Rs 8.5 crore (over \$1.1 million USD) in grants for projects for creating innovative solutions to address the issue. Over 3 lakh (300,000) women and girls across 17 states will benefit from initiatives to close the gender digital divide and increase women's economic empowerment through technology.

Speaking on the announcement, **Smt. Nita M Ambani, Founder-Chairperson, Reliance Foundation**, said, "It has been our mission to enable and empower women in every walk of life. When we launched Jio, we envisioned a digital revolution that will be an equal opportunity revolution. Through Jio, we have been providing affordable connectivity across the length and breadth of our country. Reliance Foundation has also been working in partnership with USAID towards bridging the gender digital divide in India. Technology is a powerful means to address and eliminate inequality. I congratulate and welcome on board the ten winners of our WomenConnect Challenge India on this journey of transformation."

The ten grantees are Anudip Foundation, Barefoot College International, Centre for Youth and Social Development, Friends of Women's World Banking, Naandi Foundation, Professional Assistance for Development Action, Society for Development Alternatives, Solidaridad Regional Expertise Centre, TNS India Foundation and ZMQ Development. The solutions address women farmers, entrepreneurs, members of Self-Help Groups to address social and cultural barriers to bridge the gender digital divide.

The WomenConnect Challenge India was launched in August 2020. From a pool of over 180 applications, 10 organisations were selected with grants between INR 75 lakhs to 1 crore each (\$100,000 - \$135,000), for over a period of 12 to 15 months. In January 2021, USAID and Reliance Foundation jointly hosted a Solvers Symposium bringing together semi-finalists and external experts for capacity building while brainstorming on the gender digital divide in India.

Mobile internet awareness has been increasing each year among women. While in 2017 only 19% of women in India were aware of mobile internet; in 2020 this increased to 53%. In terms of ownership, 67% of women own a mobile phone compared to 79% men. Through the years, initiatives by Reliance Foundation have aimed to bridge the digital divide. Through Reliance Jio, over 1.3 billion Indians saw a pan-India digital revolution that transformed lives. Today, Jio is the largest digital services company in India, and the second largest in the world, with 120 million women Jio users, and the number is growing rapidly to bridge the digital divide.

The WomenConnect Challenge is a global call for solutions to improve women's participation in everyday life by meaningfully changing the ways women access and use technology. USAID has partnered with Reliance Foundation to support new approaches that close the gender digital divide in India and new grantees will focus on proven strategies from previous WomenConnect rounds to increase women's economic empowerment.

**About Reliance Foundation:**

*Reliance Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Reliance Industries Limited, aims to play a catalytic role in addressing the nation's development challenges through innovative and sustainable solutions. Led by Founder and Chairperson Smt. Nita Ambani, Reliance Foundation (RF) is relentlessly working towards facilitating transformative changes to ensure overall well-being and higher quality of life for all. Among India's largest social initiatives, RF is focused on addressing the nation's development challenges in Rural Transformation, Education, Health, Sports for Development, Disaster Response, Urban Renewal and Arts, Culture and Heritage. RF has touched the lives of more than 51 million people across India, in more than 44,700 villages and several urban locations.*

*Learn more: [www.reliancefoundation.org](http://www.reliancefoundation.org)*

**About USAID:**

*USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID works to help lift lives, build communities, advance democracy, and champions the cause of women empowerment across the globe. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity; demonstrates American generosity; and helps countries progress along their development journey.*

*To date, USAID has 16 WomenConnect Challenge grantees in three different rounds working to address barriers limiting women's access to technology and connecting nearly 6 million women in 16 countries. WomenConnect Round One, in 2018, awarded nine grants and WomenConnect Round Two, awarded three in 2019. Earlier this year, four winners were announced for WomenConnect Round Three.*