Digital Village
Harisal

Amravati - Maharashtra

About 600 kms from Mumbai, amidst the Melghat Tiger Reserve in the Satpura mountain ranges, Harisal village is situated in district Amravati. Villages in Melghat, inhabited by the Korku tribal community, were once characterised by the lack of roads, electricity, mobile connectivity and public infrastructure. Harisal had been plagued for years by atrocious child, infant and maternal mortality rate, high migration rate, general malnutrition, infant and maternal malnutrition.

The idea of establishing a digital village aided by government of Maharashtra in collaboration with various private sector partners was conceptualised after Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis met Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in Silicon Valley, USA, in June 2015.

Harisal was chosen as the pilot nodal village because of its strategic location and a MoU was formally signed on April 21, 2016 between Microsoft Corp and the Government of Maharashtra. This led the way for various activities under a digitally oriented project aimed at addressing several issues simultaneously.

Within a year they drove on-ground execution to build a model village showcasing digitally-powered telemedicine, digital education, agriculture and commerce, e-PDS etc. There was not even cell phone connectivity when the project began. So using a new technology called TV Whitespace, a high speed internet was enabled in just nine days which provided a 20 MBPS connectivity.

Agriculture was the primary occupation of the people of Harisal. Hence, agencies were deployed to educate the farmers bout the use of modern methods to obtain real time information on agricultural techniques. They also established a digital class room to educate the youth and impart skills. Whereupon, the villagers learnt how to handle technical instruments like solar panels, and skills such as stitching, bee keeping, etc.

To provide health care services to this remote location, telemedicine was made available through Air-Jaldi networks to help eliminate distance barriers and improve access to medical services that are not available in rural areas and thus, saving lives in critical care and emergency situations. Through e-Health Centre (e-HC), a Hewlett-Packard Enterprise-CSIR initiative, information technology is being used to enable local healthcare services with telemedicine for collecting data pertaining to patients' health and related issues.

A Citizen Services Centre was also enabled to provide important Government Certificates to people online. Efforts are being made to improve transparency, connectivity and e-governance systems, including e-PDS, along with Government to Citizen (G2C) and Business to consumer (B2C) services.

Digital Village Harisal project implementation has made it possible for the citizens of Harisal and Melghat region in Amravati, to avail good quality health care, school education, skill development, local business opportunities, employment, banking and agricultural services via the deployment of digital technology.

After successful implementation of the Digital Village initiative at Harisal, Government of Maharashtra has decided to replicate this initiative in 1,000 villages through Village Social Transformation Mission.

CHALLENGES FACED
- Sustaining the use of technology is a challenge
- The Digital Classroom and telemedicine centre will need continuous updating and better internet connectivity and other needs
- Training and educating settled farmers to use mobile apps such as mKrishi, Kisan Suvidha, AgMarknet for weather alert, dealers, market prices, agro advisories, and plant protection, to their benefit in agriculture productivity was a challenge

FINAL OUTCOMES
- Harisal now has 201 mobile phones and free internet through Wi-Fi and has over 70 active users
- Through mKrishi, an information dissemination app created by collaboration with TCS, around 20 farmers receive agricultural information through SMS
- Over 154 patients have availed the telemedicine facility; 691 eye care patients have been attended so far; 3,634 students from 29 schools were screened and 144 provided with spectacles