9th COMMUNITY NETWORK XCHANGE Asia/Pacific 2025

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Meaningful Access, Data & Hyper Local Communities

Profile Book - 2025



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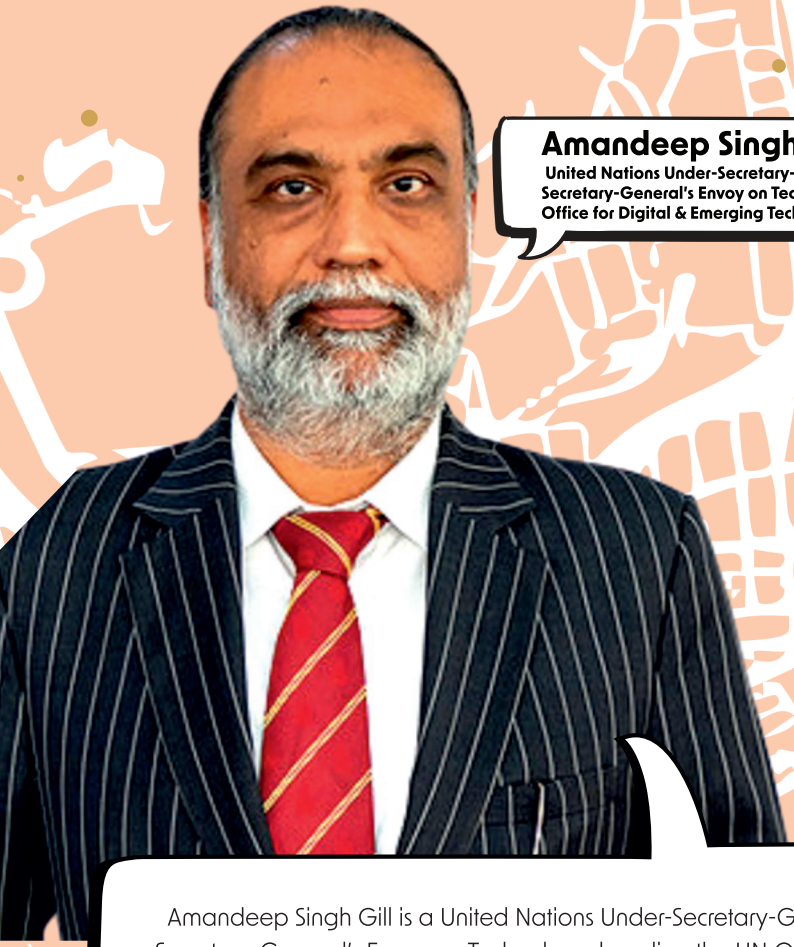
Profile Book - 2025



Osama Manzar
Founder-Director
Digital Empowerment Foundation



Osama Manzar works at the intersection of Access to Rights and Rights to Access. A Senior Ashoka Fellow and British Chevening Scholar, he is the founder of the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), established in 2002. Under his leadership, DEF has digitally empowered over 35 million people through a network of 2000+ Communication Information Resource Centres across India. Osama has been a key architect of India's inclusive digital ecosystem, influencing national initiatives such as the Digital Literacy Mission, Common Service Centres, the ban on Free Basics, and the liberalization of ISP licensing through PM-WANI. He has also led pioneering grassroots efforts to counter misinformation, including the creation of a cadre of rural women fact-checkers, frontline digital defenders combating misinformation in underserved communities. At the core of Osama's vision is the SoochnaPreneur model, a community-driven social entrepreneurship model to digital development that empowers local communities, especially women and persons with disabilities, to deliver last-mile access to information and citizen services. Osama serves on several global boards and advisory bodies, including WiDEF, APC, GNI, and the World Summit Awards. He was profiled by The Hindu as "the man who travelled more than 10,000 villages." A regular columnist for Mint, he has co-authored over 20 publications, including Internet Economy of India and NetChakra.

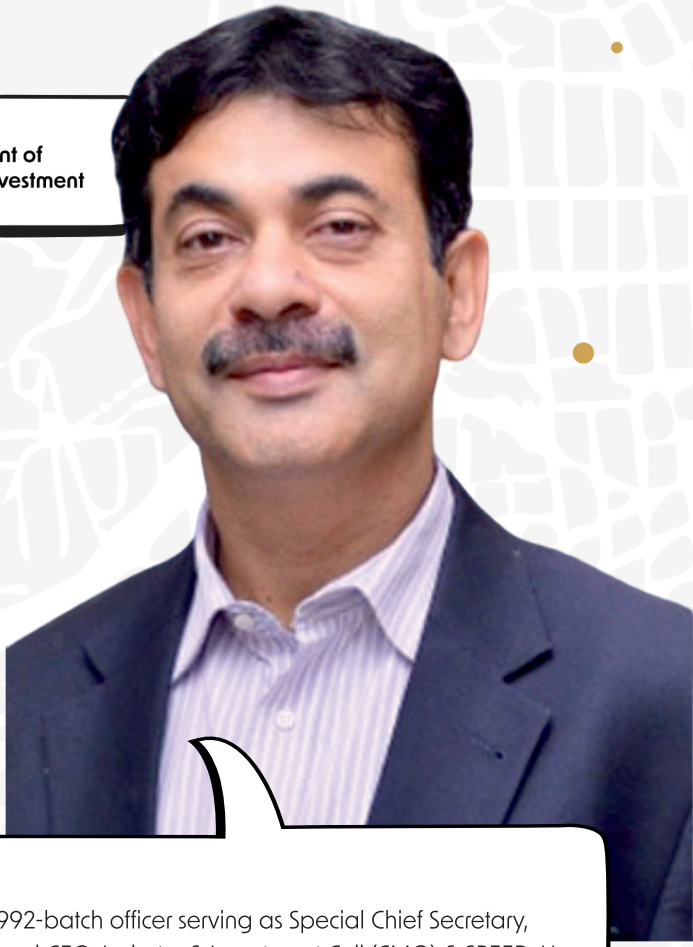


Amandeep Singh Gill

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, heading the UN Office for Digital & Emerging Technologies (ODET)

Amandeep Singh Gill is a United Nations Under-Secretary-General and the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, heading the UN Office for Digital & Emerging Technologies (ODET). He leads UN digital cooperation, including follow-up to the Global Digital Compact and work on AI governance, and serves on the Secretary-General's High-level Advisory Body on AI and Scientific Advisory Board. Earlier, he was India's Ambassador & Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament and chaired the 2017 UN Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems; he also led the Secretariat of the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation and was CEO of I-DAIR in Geneva. He holds a BTech from Panjab University and a PhD from King's College London.

Jayesh Ranjan
Special Chief Secretary, Government of Telangana, and CEO, Industry & Investment Cell (CMO) & SPEED



Jayesh Ranjan, IAS is a 1992-batch officer serving as Special Chief Secretary, Government of Telangana, and CEO, Industry & Investment Cell (CMO) & SPEED. He also holds additional charge of Youth Advancement, Tourism & Culture (YAT&C) and Director, Archaeology. He serves on the boards of RICH, WE HUB Foundation, and T-Works, and is an Agenda Contributor to the World Economic Forum. Since 2023, he has co-led the Digital Citizen Summit and has co-curated the Just AI Awards since its launch in 2024.



Srinivas Taluka
T-Hub

Mr Srinivas Taluka is the Vice President of Facilities at T-Hub. A seasoned management professional with 25 years of experience, Mr Taluka brings expertise in facilities management, infrastructure management, general administration, marketing, and corporate communication.



P V Unnikrishnan
Member Secretary, K-DISC

Dr. P V Unnikrishnan is a distinguished professional with over 37 years of experience spanning academia, research, government, and consulting. Specialising in EC Engineering and e-Gov, he has spearheaded critical projects in decentralized planning, administrative reforms, service delivery and knowledge management. He has gained national and international recognition for his work in e-governance for local self-government institutions. He leads Kerala's transition to a Knowledge Economy and has received numerous accolades.

Sonia Jorge
Founder and Executive Director,
Global Digital Inclusion Partnership



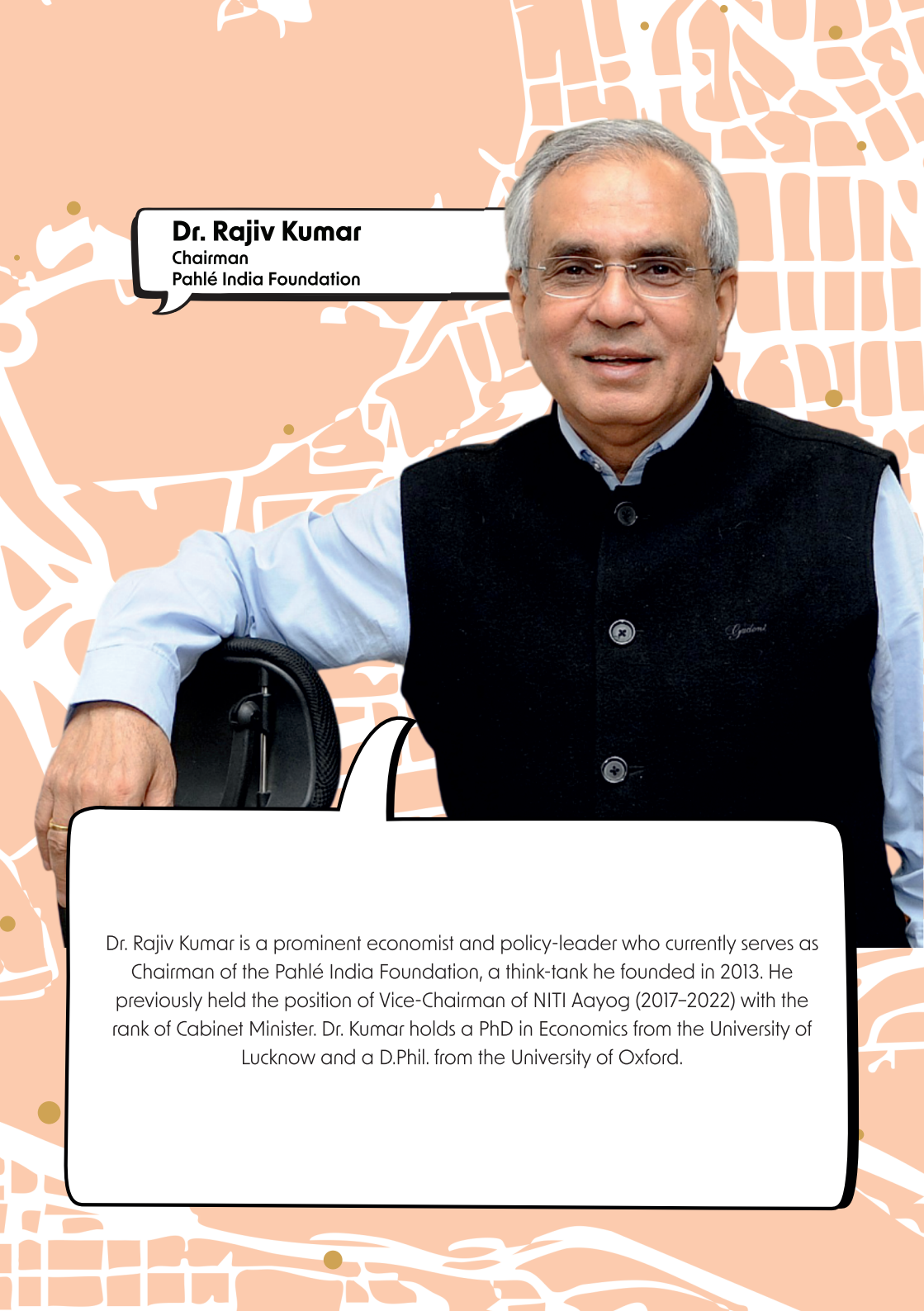
Sonia Jorge is the Founder and Executive Director of the Global Digital Inclusion Partnership (GDIP). Sonia is an experienced leader and international digital policy expert. She had successfully led global coalitions, bringing together the private sector, governments, and civil society actors from across the globe to deliver the policies needed to reduce the cost to connect and make universal meaningful connectivity a reality for everyone in global majority countries. As a policy advisor and gender equality advocate with experience in over 45 countries, she has led numerous digital policy and development projects in several regions and with international organisations, such as the World Bank, UNDP, UN Women, ITU, and for private sector companies and associations.



Anriette Esterhuysen

Senior Advisor on Global and Regional Internet Governance at Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Anriette Esterhuysen is an internet activist and policy leader, currently Senior Advisor on global and regional internet governance at Association for Progressive Communications (APC). She previously served as APC's Executive Director, where she advanced access, rights, and ICT for development across the Global South. A former Executive Director of SANGONeT, she has been active in digital rights and connectivity initiatives since the 1980s and was inducted into the Internet Hall of Fame in 2013 for her pioneering work connecting civil society in Africa.



Dr. Rajiv Kumar
Chairman
Pahlé India Foundation

Dr. Rajiv Kumar is a prominent economist and policy-leader who currently serves as Chairman of the Pahlé India Foundation, a think-tank he founded in 2013. He previously held the position of Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog (2017–2022) with the rank of Cabinet Minister. Dr. Kumar holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Lucknow and a D.Phil. from the University of Oxford.



Vandana Vasudevan
Journalist and Author



Vandana Vasudevan studied in the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and worked in the corporate sector for many years. She shifted career tracks and became a development sector professional, consulting for various national and international organizations after obtaining a PhD in urban development from the University of Grenoble, France. Besides OTP Please, she is also the author of Urban Villager: Life In An Indian Satellite Town and Tough Customer. She has written extensively for mainstream newspapers and was a columnist for several years for Mint and DNA.



Neeti Biyani
Senior Advisor, Strategy and Development
APNIC Foundation

Neeti Biyani is Senior Advisor, Strategy and Development at APNIC Foundation. She brings extensive regional and global experience spanning intergovernmental and governmental agencies, civil society, and the technology sector.

Over the years, Neeti has worked on issues of transparency, governance, social development, and justice, driven by her belief in strategic, evidence-based approaches to create meaningful and sustainable transformation. At the Foundation, she leads strategy, planning, development, and impact initiatives while also coordinating advocacy frameworks focused on digital and internet development. Her work bridges the Foundation's diverse programs, leveraging synergies to strengthen outcomes and advance systemic change.

Setu Bandh Upadhyay
Senior Advisor - Policy & Advocacy,
Internet Society



Setu Bandh Upadhyay is Senior Advisor for Policy and Advocacy at the Internet Society, leading global efforts to advance an open, secure, and trustworthy internet. He has previously worked with the Global Network Initiative, Mozilla, Global Voices, and the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, focusing on community and people-oriented tech policy and civil society engagement across the Global Majority. Setu holds a Master's in Public Policy from Central European University and is a trained lawyer in India.



Dr. Syed Sultan Kazi
Director at Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD)

Syed is an ICTD professional for over 20 years now. He specialises in digital for community development and has worked in key pan India programmes, at policy, research, advocacy and implementation levels. Currently, he is Director at the Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD), a research, policy and implementing organisation, with focus on North East India Himalayan Region States. He is Senior Advisor at Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF). He is an active participant in global and regional IGFs including APrIGF. He is a contributing author to the North East Vision Document 2047, by the North Eastern Council (NEC), under Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Govt. of India. He has key research and published works. He is an MPhil and PhD from the Centre for the Study of Law & Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. He is native of Assam, India.

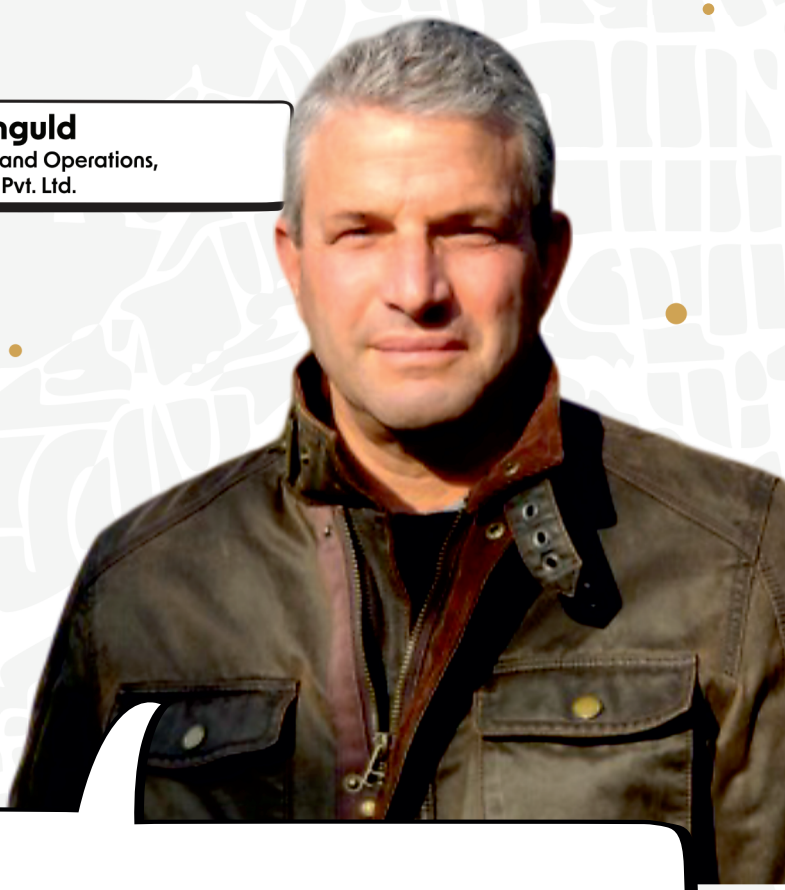
Dr Senka Hadzic

Connectivity | Telecom Policy | Digital Transformation | ICT4D



Dr Senka Hadzic (she/her) is a telecommunications engineer (PhD) and digital development expert with 10+ years of experience advancing inclusive digital infrastructure, connectivity policy, and public interest technology. She is affiliated with leading digital policy think tanks including Research ICT Africa and FGV Center for Technology and Society (CTS), and consults with various non-profits, UN agencies, and organizations in the development and humanitarian sectors on digital inclusion and equity. She is also coordinating the Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (DC3) at the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Michael Ginguld
Director, Strategy and Operations,
Rural Broadband Pvt. Ltd.



Michael Ginguld born and raised in Israel, Michael has close to 30 years of experience working in ICT, community and rural development projects in India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Nepal, and Israel. He holds a B.Sc. from the Hebrew University in Israel, an MA in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands, and an MA in Public Administration from Harvard University, USA.



Prof. Sarbani Banerjee Belur

Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS-Pilani, Hyderabad campus

Prof. Sarbani Banerjee Belur is currently affiliated to the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS-Pilani) Hyderabad campus as a Visiting Assistant professor in the department of humanities and social sciences. Her area of expertise is Citizen science, Science and technology studies where she area of focus is on technology and its social impact, digital humanities and gender studies. She has worked for over 12 years in the area of community networks in India and in Asia Pacific.

Siddhartha Malempati
Directing Council-General of the Commons Collective



Siddhartha Malempati is a multifaceted professional with over 18 years of experience spanning computer science, patent law, and economics. As the Directing Council-General of the Commons Collective, he leads a global network of activists, researchers, and practitioners working to advance the commons as a foundation for social progress.

A serial entrepreneur, Siddhartha co-founded Helico Consulting, Octacomm Technologies, and Radius EduTech, companies pioneering innovations in cloud computing, AI-driven communication, and learning management systems. A recognized free and open-source policy advocate, he has championed digital rights, net neutrality, and community technology initiatives, extending digital education to over 30,000 individuals in rural India.

Guided by a deep commitment to technological justice and collaborative innovation, Siddhartha's lifelong mission is to harness technology and collective intelligence to build a more equitable and sustainable world.

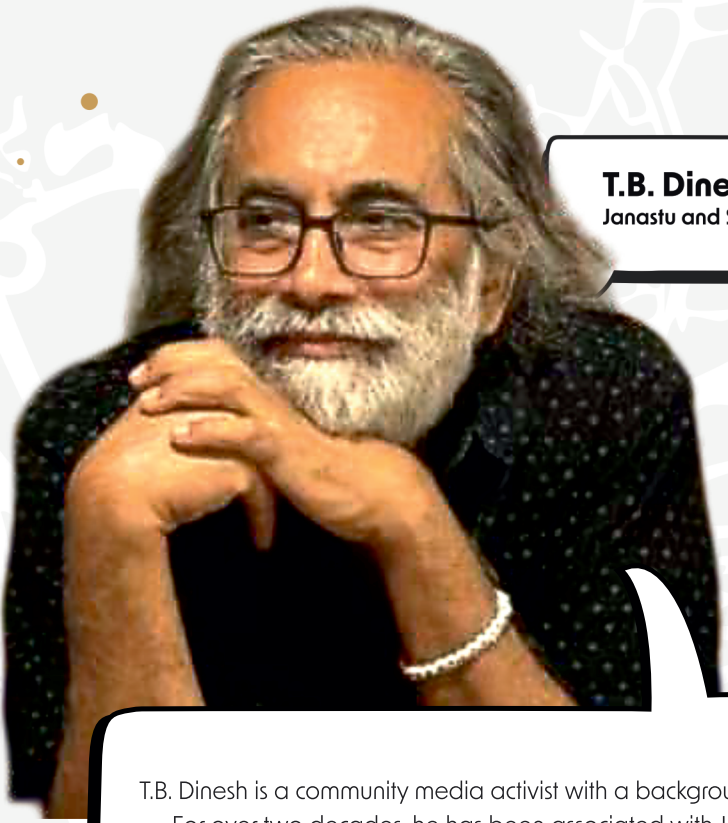


Gayani Perera
Project Manager, Foundation.lk

Gayani Perera is an experienced Project Manager currently leading the "DiGiSavi" Project under the Nenasala Development Project at Foundation.lk – LK Domain Registry. She has over ten years of experience at the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), where she played a key role in several national-level digital empowerment and community development initiatives.

She holds a Master's degree from Cardiff Metropolitan University and is passionate about promoting digital inclusion, capacity building, and sustainable development through technology-driven community projects.





T.B. Dinesh

Janastu and Setvelots

T.B. Dinesh is a community media activist with a background in computer science. For over two decades, he has been associated with Janastu and Servelots (janastu.org) in Bangalore, India. His work focuses on developing storytelling methods and empowering communities marginalized by "literates"- especially women - to share their own stories and document their ways of life.

To advance this vision, several initiatives have emerged, including IruWay, a rural research lab; Anthillhacks, inclusive camps celebrating local places; Renarration Web, an annotation-driven social semantic web; COW Mesh, a decentralized community mesh network with rich media services; and CrafterSpace, a crafts and maker space for women and youth.

Recently, Dinesh and his team have been exploring ways to leverage AI to lower barriers of interaction for low-literate women.



Gustaff Harriman Iskandar
Co-founder and Managing Director
Common Room Networks Foundation

Gustaff Harriman Iskandar is co-founder and managing director of the Common Room Networks Foundation. Graduating from the Fine Arts Department at the Bandung Institute of Technology, he has since been at the forefront of integrating art, technology, and community development. Through initiatives like the Bandung Center for New Media Arts and Common Room, he has championed interdisciplinary collaborations that bridge urban and rural communities. His work emphasizes participatory approaches, fostering inclusive digital ecosystems that empower local cultures and promote sustainable development across Indonesia.



Akhmat Safrudin
Leader
Technology Development

Akhmat Safrudin is an experienced ICT leader with over 15 years in technology development, software engineering and cloud infrastructure. Currently serving as the Asia regional coordinator for capacity building for the Local Networks initiative, his current focus is on addressing the digital divide by fostering community-centred connectivity initiatives. He has a strong background in open source technology and has led initiatives in software development, the internet of things (IoT) and cybersecurity.



Indriyatno Banyumurti
Executive Director
ICT Watch Indonesia

Indriyatno Banyumurti is executive director of ICT Watch Indonesia, a civil society organization pioneering the "Internet Sehat" movement since 2002. With extensive experience in public education, policy engagement, and community empowerment, he focuses on promoting safe, responsible, and inclusive use of digital technology across Indonesia. He has been actively involved in developing digital literacy modules, training educators and communities nationwide, and collaborating with government institutions, private sectors, and international organizations to combat misinformation, online harm, and digital inequality.

Heena Singhal
Lead Research and Partnerships,
Video Volunteers



Heena Singhal is a sociologist and qualitative researcher who leads research and partnerships at Video Volunteers, focusing on caste, gender and social justice.



Manoj Bhardwaj
Head, Projects and Skilling

Manoj Bhardwaj joined AirJaldi's deployment team in 2013 and went on to serve as Network Head and later as Regional Head in Uttarakhand. In 2024, he assumed the role of Head of Projects and Skilling, where he leads AirJaldi's projects, partnerships, training, and skilling initiatives. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Arts and is a graduate of the AirJaldi Networking 108 course. Manoj is based in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.



Mahima Sonal
SoochnaPreneur
Digital Empowerment Foundation

Mahima Sonal hails from Dattu Panchayat Chulhe in Dharma Valley, Dharchula block, Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand. She has completed her graduation and is currently working with the Digital Empowerment Foundation as a Soochnapreneur, helping bridge the digital divide in her community.



Prof. Bornini Lahiri
Assistant Professor of Linguistics,
Indian Institute of Technology

Prof. Bornini Lahiri is an Assistant Professor of Linguistics at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. Her research interests include Language and Folklore documentation and Description, Linguistic Typology and Language Resources for Minority Languages. For the last several years, she has been working on documenting and describing various minor languages of Eastern India, including Dhimal, Mahali, Toto, Mundari, Kurmali etc. She has led the creation of language resources, digital materials and teaching-learning materials for these languages. She has also extensively studied ethno-linguistic features of these languages, bringing to the fore amazing facts about these languages and cultures. She currently leads the SpeeD-TB project (funded by MEITY), which aims to build 1200 hours of speech datasets and speech technologies for six of the minortised Tibeto-Burman languages such as Toto, Nyishi, Chokri, Kok Borok, Bodo and Meiteilon.



Rajasekhar P.
operations, focusing on building resilient and accessible communication systems.
Octacomm



Rajasekhar P. is part of the Commons Collective and has been involved with the Free Software Movement for more than a decade, working on community-led approaches to technology and communication.
He currently works with Octacomm in operations, focusing on building resilient and accessible communication systems. With earlier experience as a journalist at The Times of India and Deccan Chronicle, he brings insights from media and public communication into his work on last-mile connectivity and decentralised, offline models for rural communities.



Ritesh Kumar
Co-founder and Director, Council for Diversity and Innovation,
Co-founder and CEO of UnReaL-TecE LLP

Ritesh Kumar is a Co-founder and Director of the Council for Diversity and Innovation, and Co-founder and CEO of UnReaL-TecE LLP, Agra. He is also a Fellow and Lead in the Division on Artificial Intelligence and Linguistics at the Council for Strategic and Defense Research, New Delhi. His research interests lie broadly at the intersection of pragmatics, sociolinguistics and language technologies for underrepresented communities and languages. He has worked on the theoretical and computational modelling of politeness, impoliteness and aggression in language, leading to the development of automated systems for the recognition of hateful, offensive and aggressive language. He has also been working on the development of language resources and technologies (such as ASR systems, POS taggers, language models, etc.) for various minorities and endangered languages of India (such as Awadhi, Beda, Magahi, Toto, Chokri, among others) and also worked towards the development of software tools and infrastructure for supporting this kind of research. His recent work in projects such as SpeeD-TB and BoLI has led to the development of the first large-scale datasets and models for some of the most underserved languages of India.

Ritu Srivastava
IEEE Future Networks' CTU and FNEM (Consultant) and Director, Jadeite Solutions



Ms. Ritu Srivastava is a technology and connectivity policy professional with an interdisciplinary academic background, holding a Master's degree in Electronics and Telecommunications and an MBA in Information & Technology. Based in India, Ms. Ritu work lies at the intersection of communication technologies, digital inclusion, and community centric infrastructure models. Currently, she is serving as a Program Officer at IEEE Future Networks and suppor6ng them for two programs - Connecting the Unconnected (CTU) program and the Future Networks Entrepreneurs Mentorship (FNEM).



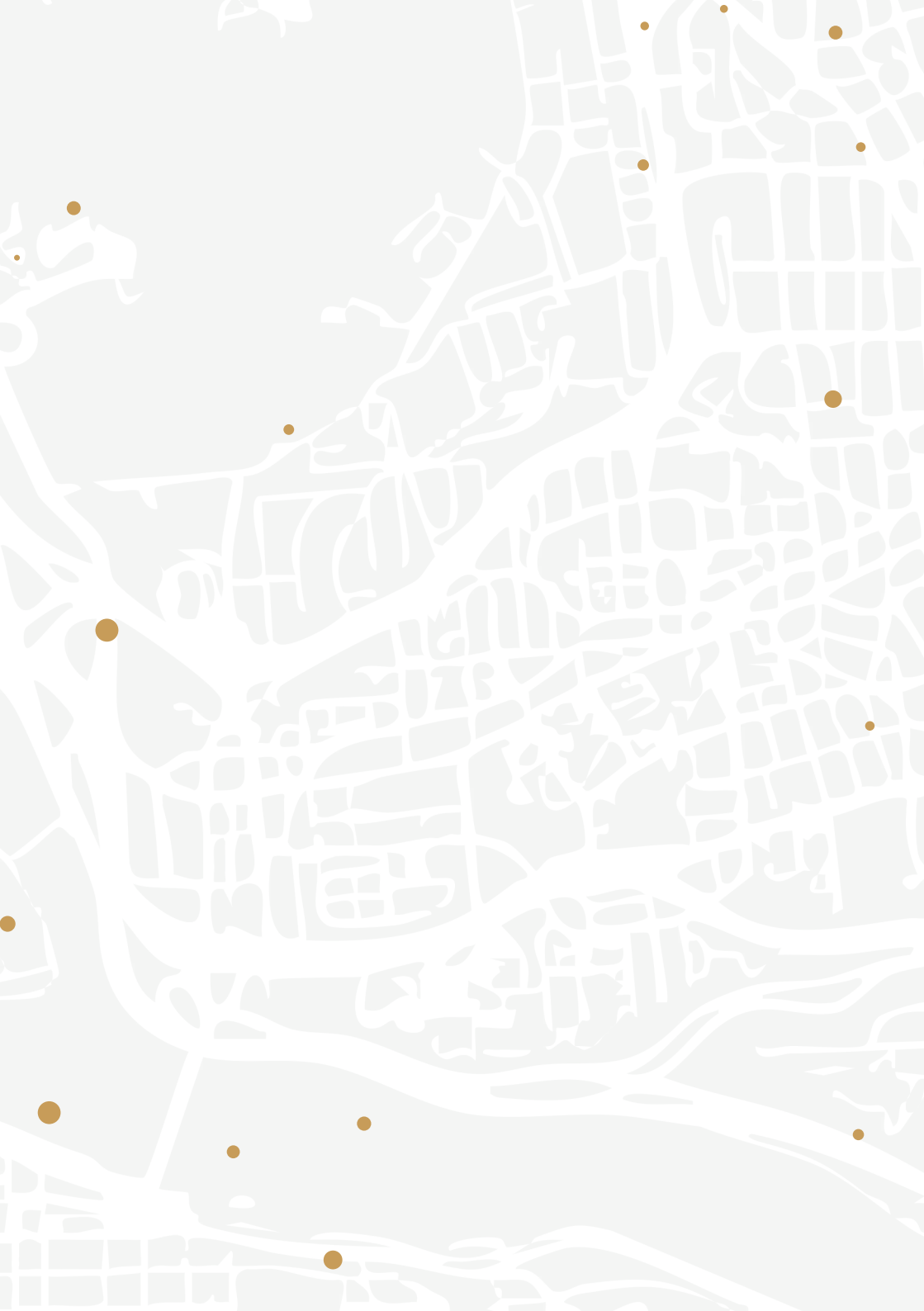
Sampath Sri Rajarathne
Senior Project Coordinator
Foundation.lk

Sampath Sri Rajarathne is a senior project coordinator for Foundation.lk, Sri Lanka. He is currently engaged in projects that promote digital literacy and Cybersafety awareness. He is an active contributor to many initiatives that are sponsored by the Foundation.lk including Cyber Lowata Piyapath, Gurugedara projects which were providing ICT knowledge to the school students of Sri Lanka and the Hithawathi cyber safety project. He is engaged with many government institutions and non-government organizations which works co-operatively in the same interest areas. He represents the Foundation.lk in digital and mass media while also being a Development Enthusiast, Transformation Strategist and a Change Maker. Sampath is a member of ISOC Sri Lanka chapter. He works closely with grassroot level agencies and possess an expertise in Community Development activities & Digital Inclusion. He is a graduate from University College Dublin and currently reading for the MBA from University of Kelaniya Sri Lanka.

Shalini A.
Janastu and Servelots



Shalini who works on Community technology projects is been part of the Janastu and Servelots (janastu.org) in Bangalore, India for more than a decade. She does setting up Community Networks to the unconnected areas in various part of India to establish meaningful connection. She is closely associated with women and youths who can adopt technologies for their entrepreneurial and aspirational needs. She is also associated in developing open source dencentralized applications which is beneficial for the low-literate communities and also focuses on enabling local craft and technology for the women in the communities.



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