

# Digital Dhule – A Mission in the Making

## Harshal Vibhandik, Individual

On November 4, 2016, the first Wi-fi enabled school was inaugurated in Dhule district at *Zilla Parishad School Ghanegoan in Sakri block*. Then the school connected with Mr. Adam Greene, Educational Expert from New York City, who made the presentation to the student about historical places in New York City like Brooklyn Bridge, Central Park, and World Center Tower. Children were thrilled to see the places and know about them.

With Wi-fi enabled school the Digital School Mission (DSM) that is being carried out in Dhule district since July 2015, has embarked upon a new level.

DSM aims to bring digital learning solution to 1103 Z.P. Schools in rural Dhule District reaching over 60,000 children. So far, the DSM has successfully set up digital classrooms in 659 School by November 30, 2016, with 100% digital classrooms in all 167 ZP Schools (100%) in Shindkheda Tehsil, which has become the first tehsil in Maharashtra State to achieve it.

Digital Dhule might sound like a mission impossible to many, but I could transform it into reality due to systematic, wholehearted and collective efforts of the district education department and community. Being born and brought up in Dhule and, now based in New York City since last 10 years, I wanted to give back to my district. So I came to set up digital classrooms in a few schools, with limited resources in my hand. But teaming up with Government and Community my strength grew manifold and DSM could spread widely.

My journey started with visits to Government Z.P. Schools in rural and backward areas in Dhule to create awareness about digital education and educating teachers about how to set up a digital classroom to enhance the learning environment and offer a transformational solution in education. To be precise in last 14 months I visited 800+ villages in Dhule district.

Working with District Education Officers, Block Education Officers, Extension Officers, Cluster Head and School Principals, we planned DSM initiative. Meetings up to cluster and school level helped to clarify doubts in the minds of teacher and convinced them that digital learning is possible even with modest resources.

Teaming up with the District Education Department I addressed 194 motivation meetings – *Prerana Sabha*. The gathering was generally attended by 100-1000 people depending on the population of the village. Here I explained the importance of digital schools by showing the digital classrooms demo and different techniques of digital education by showing the videos of the digital schools and sharing their teacher's experiences.

I proposed that I would support 30% if the villagers raised 70%. I raised my funds through the donations from friends and contacts in USA and donations from *DESHBANDHU MANJU GUPTA FOUNDATIONS*. Aspiring to go digital and ensure a good education for children the communities responded very well; a total of Rs. 2.7 crores collected in donations from teachers, villagers and *Grampanchat* in respective villages.

Under the guidance of Block Development Officer (BDO), Education Officer (EO) and Block Education Officer (BEO) we also conducted the meetings of *Gram Sevak* in *Sakri* and *Shirpur taluka* to guide and motivate them to provide funds for Digital Classrooms for ZP Schools, through PESA funds for Non-TSP areas. The government provided the facility to *Grampanchayat* to spend 25% of the fund received by Grampanchayat under PESA act for Education. *Grampanchayat* contributed more than Rs. 38 lacs for Digital classroom so far.

The best part of the initiative is that it does not offer a ready-made package for everyone, but accommodates needs of every school. By organizing cluster level meetings with Principals a suitable plan for in each school was made. Digital classrooms were set up with respect to the number of student, availability of electricity and villagers' capability to donate the fund for the digital classroom in the school.

Thus a school with small student strength and limited resources could start with the tablet; an 8'-10' tablet costs around Rs. 8000-10000. The schools with a large number of students can go for a projector with interactive features or integrated computer, which would cost from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 roughly. Because of my expertise, I offered the options and enabled the community and teachers to make decisions and also do the purchasing themselves.

In Dhule the digital teachers now uses the tablet, TV or Projector screen to display and write most notes and work in class. They use digital resources like Educational software, Apps, videos, visuals, and music and have their students use them.

We would like to empower the teachers to use the vast array of electronic information sources online to create customized materials for classes. This individualization and personalization of course content enables the teacher to work on his students' strengths & weaknesses and provide a more customized approach to curricular development and delivery than is possible with a "one-size-fits-all" textbook driving the curriculum.

**Photos** attached –

1. *Mr. Nand Kumar, Principal Secretary, Education Department with Harshal Vibhandik, teachers, students and community members in Ghanegoan, Dhule*



## 2. A digital class room



## 3. Prerana Sabha

