

Gaon Connection expands its rural journalism initiative and gives a voice to community journalists throughout India

Gaon (Hindi for 'village') Connection is an Indian media platform. The organization performs two key functions: it takes information out to rural communities and brings local stories from rural areas into the broader world.

OPPORTUNITY

Gaon Connection wanted to expand the reach of its rural journalism initiative and help more local communities tell their stories online. It saw an opportunity to empower community journalists with relevant digital video and storytelling skills, and give them a platform on which to publish.

APPROACH

Gaon Connection invested in capabilities and resources to expand its rural journalism initiative to more areas beyond its home state of Uttar Pradesh. The team trained community journalists across 22 additional states in digital video best practices, then helped them reach national audiences via YouTube.

Expanding the team: Gaon Connection had an editorial team of 40 based in the Lucknow headquarters, with staff focused on Hindi text, English text, multimedia input (filmmakers), and output (video editors). Gaon Connection wanted to expand the team with community journalists, who would create videos for the brand's YouTube channel.

Defining the workflow: The community journalists would send videos to the Lucknow editorial team, who would help rewrite, edit, and package stories as needed, then publish them. The community journalists would be paid per assignment.

Training community journalists: Community journalists were trained in their home towns through a series of workshops run by the Lucknow team. They were taught to be multi-skilled: to create videos, record audio content, and carry out research and surveys, all while following digital video best practices. Gaon Connection kicked off with 12 training sessions across five states, then broadened its reach with 15 more sessions aimed at young people in rural communities. After the success of these, it offered more training sessions in different towns over the course of the project.

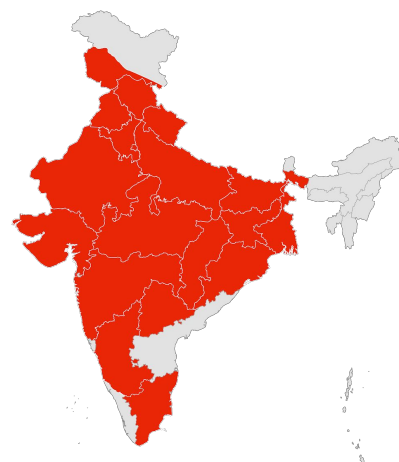
Designing content for a rural audience: Gaon Connection recognized that the rural audience in India was underserved with quality content, despite an increase in internet bandwidth and a drop in data prices. The team experimented with things like video length (from two to 90 minutes) and topic to find what resonated with different viewers. Journalists reported on topics that wouldn't ordinarily get mainstream coverage, such as the farmers of Uttarakhand who face challenges around wild animals, or profiles of sportspeople from different rural communities.

Bringing change through digital video: Many of the videos created for the Gaon Connection YouTube channel helped drive important changes to society and culture. For example, the deaths of 150 children from chamki fever (encephalitis) in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district finally gained national attention when a Gaon Connection community journalist covered it. And a group of people who attacked a 15-year-old girl in rural Uttar Pradesh were finally brought to justice after a video report about the crime aired.

Indian States reached before and after Gaon Connection's project.



States where we were present before the project



States where we reached as a result of the project

RESULTS

Gaon Connection greatly expanded the geographic reach of its rural journalism initiative. It held over **200 training workshops** across **22 different states** for over **600 participants**, including many people who are traditionally underrepresented in media, such as homemakers, farmers, villagers, etc. In 2018, Gaon Connection had 50 active community journalists reporting on issues from Uttar Pradesh and nearby areas. It now has over **100 community journalists** who regularly report from all across India.

- **1K+ video stories** created from different parts of the country in different languages.
- **164%+ increase in subscribers** to the Gaon Connection YouTube channel from 2018 to 2019.
- **278%+ increase in watch time** for videos on the Gaon Connection YouTube channel from 2018 to 2019.

LEARNINGS

Put your best mentorship foot forward: With the right mentoring, people from different walks of life can be trained to become voices for their communities. Most of the community journalists Gaon Connection worked with had plenty of talent, but lacked the essential knowledge about how to tell digital video stories that resonate with a wide audience. Having dedicated staff is critical to creating a good mentorship program, which in turn helps create great reporters who tell engaging stories.

Create stories with universal emotions: Gaon Connection focused on helping people tell personal stories important to them, but in ways that a broad audience could connect with. For example, they ran universal themes workshops for members of the LGBTQI+ community in rural Jamshedpur, and a video created in the remote area of Chhattisgarh received 5M+ views.

Optimize your channel: Over the course of the project, Gaon Connection spent time improving metadata, titles, descriptions, and thumbnails, and saw a huge jump in click-through rates and watch time as a result.

“**The community journalists are all from different walks of life. Some are journalist students, but others are farmers, housewives, or daily wage earners. These are the people who have never stepped out of their homes, but now are confident enough to look for story ideas and are producing quality content.**”

Neelesh Misra,
Founder of Gaon Connection