yugantar

Annual Report

2023-2024



Chief guests at the inauguration of the Queer-Trans Wellness and Support Center (QT Center)

Overview

Yugantar has continued its growth and impact in its four project areas, increasing reach and expertise. Budget Rani concluded its operations, marking the end of a transformative initiative aimed at empowering women in financial literacy. Digital Budget Rani initiative was launched, introducing community associates (Digital Budget Ranis) who provided training on using UPI technology. The program also emphasised accessibility improvements through a partnership with NPCI, leading to successful technological enhancements. QT Center officially opened on 25 April, 2024, and has become a vital resource for the LGBTQIA+ community. Celebrated with a dynamic opening event, the Center offers a helpline and weekly legal aid clinics, addressing various legal issues. It serves as a hub for cultural expression, hosting activities like reading circles, workshops, and community events. The Community Entitlement Center in Baba Nagar continues to serve its 9,000 residents and in the past year has supported the filing of more than 3600 entitlements. Yugantar's YouRTI initiative has remained active, filing 2,443 RTIs and receiving 4,812 responses over the past year.

This annual report highlights significant achievements in empowering marginalised communities, fostering financial literacy, and promoting inclusivity. As we move forward, the focus will remain on expanding our initiatives and addressing the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

Women’s Financial Inclusion: Digital Budget Rani

Budget Rani brought its operations to an end in April 2024, commencing with a roundtable held at the Center for Economic and Social Studies. The roundtable presented the Budget Rani program and its learnings to a panel of different experts from banks, self-help groups, unions, and researchers who provided insight and experience.

Through interactive workshop utilising games, skits and discussions, Budget Rani successfully trained 504 members of the Telangana Domestic Workers' Union with 63 percent reporting that they started depositing money in their bank and 67 percent reporting saving.

Budget Rani provided important lessons, it was found that women would turn to chit funds and money lenders as their first choice of financial support, with many viewing banks as inaccessible institutions where they will be un-welcomed or viewed unfavourably. Women also needed greater handholding to access financial services and to utilise the technology they had access to.

Selected as a winner of USAID’s and Reliance Foundation’s WomenConnect Challenge, India, Round 2, Digital Budget Rani was designed to overcome these challenges. Community associates, known as Digital Budget Ranis (DBRs), equipped with a smartphone and an offline digital curriculum, teach women in their communities how to use UPI with the technology they hold in their very hands, be it a smartphone or feature phone. Access to UPI ensures that women have a bank account, linked to a phone number they have access to and have a method to send, store and receive money easily, a prerequisite for financial inclusion. The program leverages NPCI’s Ultracash BHIM IVR, a UPI a service that can be used on feature phones without a data connection and also useful for people with low literacy levels.



Film shooting for the Digital Budget Rani video content. A YouTube playlist was also created with the women centric videos that teach women how to use UPI safely and in its different forms.



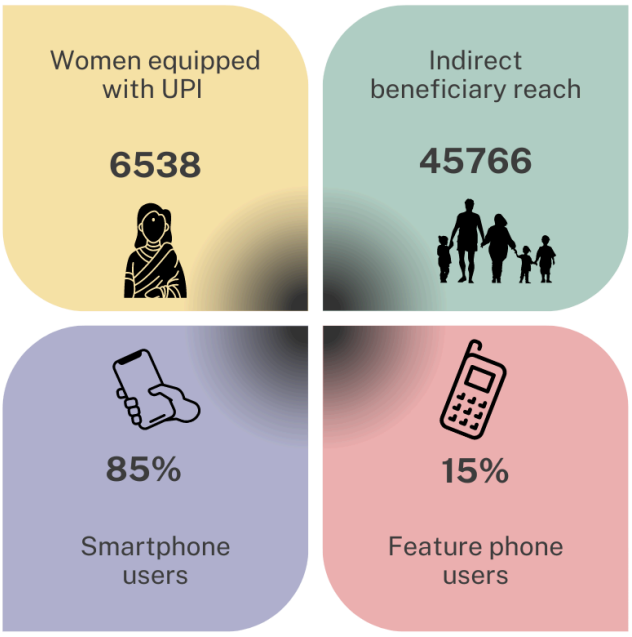
Two day workshops were conducted in Hyderabad and Vizag to train the cadre of Digital Budget Ranis. 60 women in total were trained and provided new smartphones and SIM cards to begin their digital revolution.



Digital Budget Ranis training women in the field

The challenges of women's digital financial inclusion and the challenges faced by technology designed for marginalised communities were confronted thick and fast. Challenges with Ultracash BHIM IVR were confronted that made the service inaccessible to the very communities it targets.

To overcome these challenges a partnership was made with the National Payment Cooperation of India (NPCI). This partnership has been successful in improving the technology making it more accessible to women. As a result of our collaboration, 4 technological changes were made along with the introduction of a new IVR phone number. During this collaboration NPCI has received their largest number of registrations.



Queer-Trans Wellness and Support Center (QT Center)

The much awaited QT Center officially opened its doors 25 April. Interactive games, poetry and dance celebrated the opening of the Center. It was an uplifting event that saw the coming together of many different people. Chief quests included Arvind Kumar IAS, Shikha Goel IPS and Swati Kantamani head CSR, NATCO.

The QT Center hit the ground running with a helpline, set up in collaboration with Bhoomika and a weekly legal aid clinic. The legal aid services run every Saturday and cover a range of cases relevant within the community ranging from assault and battery to legal identity and sexual assault. Members of QT Center have and continue to accompany queer and trans individuals to facilitate the filing of complaints and aid in seeking appropriate legal representation.

LGBTQIA+ people use QT Center for a variety of different activities such as co-working space, dress-up in gender affirming clothes, and to interact with other members of the community. It has since become a vibrant place of cultural expression with regular reading circles, plays, workshops, talks, film screenings, community potlucks, and many more such events. It has also become a valuable space for meetings of groups such as STAR (Society for Trans men Action and Rights), Mobbera, Ambedkar Study Circle, the Babasaheb Ambedkar Reading Circle which holds regular discussions and "Growing Together" for queer people over the age of 30.

In it's first year running, more than 1000 people have used QT Center services.



Pause for Perspective mental health workshop at QT Center

A major element of QT Center is mental health and we have been lucky to have partnered with Pause for Perspective, one of Hyderabad's leading organisations for psychological services and wellness with a specialisation on queer issues. Pause for Perspective has been holding weekly group activities since the start of the year, completing 100 sessions with 209 people attending. Furthermore, Pause for Perspective is providing community members individual therapy sessions, free of cost.

In collaboration with the Drama Association for the Deaf (DAD), QT Center put up a play at the Hyderabad Literature Festival that amplified Deaf and queer voices. In a collaborative theatre project, DAD and QT Center created a story with deaf and queer characters that were whole and complex, with flaws, idiosyncrasies, and cultures. By bringing together two groups of people that hadn't organically interacted together before, we were able to find commonalities, reflect upon subconsciously held biases, and make efforts to reach out to each other. It was a rewarding experience and we aim to continue our collaboration with this community.



Along with serving as a safe space for queer and trans individuals, QT Center has also been doing sensitisation workshops at institutions ranging from professional groups and civic services, such as the police and the Print and Electronic Media Journalists - Hyderabad, to universities such as GITAM (facilitated in part by their queer club). These workshops have happened at a very regular pace.

To develop policy and increase awareness among India's LGBTQIA+ community, a community consultation was conducted. The aim was to come together as a community and brainstorm legitimate ways in which to create structural, lasting support and gain insights into the implementation of a gender-neutral shelter space. The consultation was held with more than 40 activists, NGOs and community

leaders from across the country for a 3 day workshop. The workshop was activity lead and created a safe space for new ideas and opinions.



Queer Legal Intervention Training was conducted with the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR). Through a six-week training program we explored various facets of constitutional, civil, and criminal law through the lens of queer and trans rights. We trained grassroots activists and students with modes and methods of crisis intervention, providing support during crisis, and intervening with police-related issues grounded in queer-feminist and anti-caste ideology. The program was conducted in a mix of Telugu, English, and Hindi. The training was free of cost and a certificate of completion was provided to 35 members who successfully finished the course.

Over the course of the next year, we aim to open the temporary crisis shelter.

Community Entitlement Center, Baba Nagar Old City

The Community Center is operational in two slum areas with a total of 9000 people. Members of a third block have been approaching the Community Center for particular programs such as the correction of government identification documents and occasionally for medical aid camps, such as the one on seasonal flu, malaria and communicable diseases with a focus on key health and hygiene issues. An effort is being made to include this area into the scope of the project.

One of the slum areas has seen infrastructural improvement in the form of six new roads laid in collaboration with the GHMC and the removal of large garbage bins preventing the spread of illness and disease among the residents. A new ward office was set up in the Community Center in order to cut turnaround time for complaints down to 24 hours.

1650 households have been linked with basic services; such as free water, and newborn kits and with social security schemes; such as old age pension, ration cards, youth unemployment and so on. As it stands, schemes that have been introduced by the previous government administration have been halted post the elections in 2024 and these factors have posed a challenge in moving forward, especially in the case of the 22 households that made it onto the list for 2BHK housing.

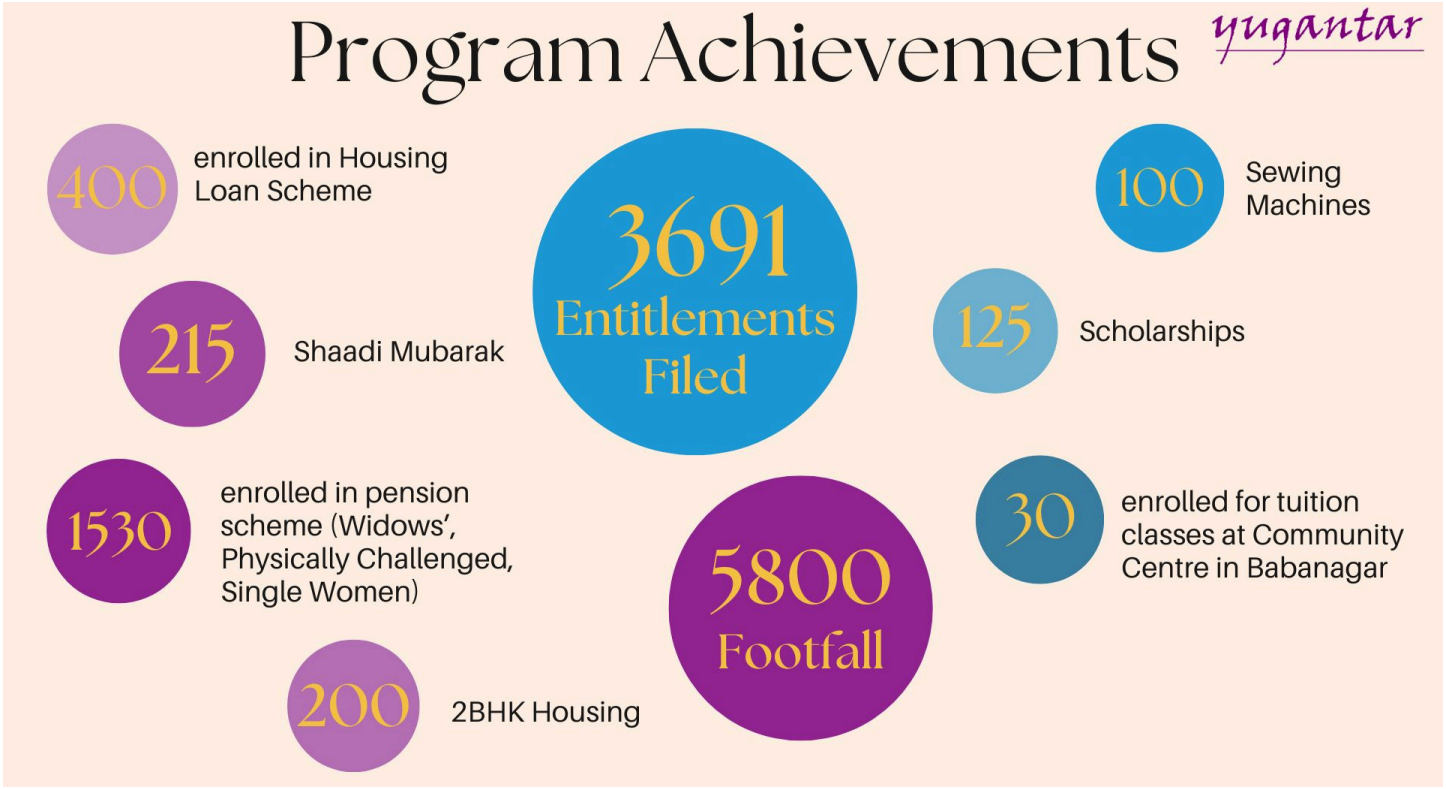
On an individual level, the Community Center has supported 125 students in their scholarship applications at the post-matriculation level. They have obtained INR 10,000 which has served as an encouragement. Applicants for both the Telangana Minority Corporation scheme for the promotion of the self-employed; and the Telangana Minority Finance Corporation scheme for small businesses have both seen some measure of success. Two out of ten applicants for the former secured a loan of INR 10

lakhs to support their businesses and 16 applicants for the latter scheme secured small business loans of INR 1 lakh.

The Community Center has hosted financial literacy workshops and now provides tuition classes for 30 students along with access to a Pratham library with books in English, Urdu, and Telugu. The library itself has been segregated based on reading levels. As of now, children from LKG to class 8 have attended the tuition lessons. In this area, there is hopefully more to be done in the future.



Expansion is the goal of the future of the Baba Nagar project. Two new, fully staffed locations are hopefully on the horizon along with a larger range of concerns with which they will engage; such as water, sanitation, electricity, and vocational training for older children.



YouRTI.in

Yugantar's YouRTI website has been seeing consistent work for the past few years. Over the past year in particular, 2443 RTIs have been filed on a vast number of matters and 4812 responses have been received. Occasionally, one RTI receives more than one response based on how many people it has been forwarded to for the information to be collected. This explains the disparity in the number of RTIs filed and the responses received. Having been officially active for five years, YouRTI also has an on-ground presence and is a resource that has traveled through word of mouth as well leading to many calling its team members requesting information to be filed for through YouRTI.

YouRTI sees regular coverage in newspapers. Between April 2023 and March 2024, there have been 41 articles published in the newspaper of which prior intimation was given to the team. There are plenty more that fly under the radar while they both credit and use information provided by YouRTI. Major publications such as The Hindu, Times of India, and Deccan Chronicle have reported on YouRTI more than once but local newspapers such as The Siasat Daily have formed a bulk of the reporting. Some links to articles have been given below.

ToI, The Hindu 1, The Hindu 2, New India Express, Siasat