



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

4. Evolving Landscape of Digital Inclusion in India - Governance

'The Evolving Landscape of Digital Inclusion in India', released by National Council of Applied Economic Research, argues India's digital divide has entered new phase.

1. While mobile phone ownership has reached 95.1% of households, only 39.7% of individuals aged 15 and above use internet reflecting access-usage gap.
2. The report identifies critical disconnect between device ownership and meaningful digital participation limiting inclusive growth benefits.

1.Digital Divide Analysis

Apparent Success Masking Deeper Challenges

1. India's digital revolution succeeded in putting mobile phones in nearly every household but fallen short of delivering meaningful digital inclusion.
2. 95.1% of households own mobile device and 74.8% have access to smartphone or internet-enabled phone.
3. However, only 39.7% of individuals aged 15 and above use internet despite high device ownership indicating significant usage gap.

Persistent Connectivity Gaps

1. Around 27.5% of households remain offline with connectivity gaps varying by location and income.
2. 32.2% of rural India remains offline despite rapid digitalization in urban areas creating rural-urban divide.
3. 52.1% among poorest consumption group lacks connectivity highlighting income-based digital exclusion.

Entertainment-Driven Usage Patterns

1. Internet use among connected households is largely entertainment-driven rather than productive or skill-building focused.
2. About 66% use internet to watch movies, television, or news content; 53.8% use social media.
3. Only 16.1% use internet for online courses and 11.4% access government services digitally limiting productive usage.

Hidden Dependency and Literacy Divide

1. One in five households requires help from someone outside to use digital services rising to one in three among households with no formal education.
2. This "hidden divide" prevents independent digital participation and creates dependence on intermediaries.

Gender and Age Disparities

1. Internet use among working-age adults stands at 57.6% for men and 35.6% for women indicating significant gender gap.
2. Only 37.8% of children aged 13-16 actively use internet limiting digital skills development among youth.

2.Government Initiatives for Digital Inclusion

Digital India Program

1. Launched July 1, 2015, Digital India program envisions transforming India into knowledge-based economy and digitally empowered society.
2. Comprehensive framework addressing digital infrastructure, services, and literacy across sectors.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

1. Enables instant, interoperable, and secure transactions between individuals and merchants in real time.
2. International Monetary Fund recognized UPI as world's largest retail fast payment system by transaction volume in 2025.
3. Within India, 81% of total retail payment transactions processed on UPI demonstrating dominance.

PM-WANI Framework

1. Wi-Fi Access Network Interface framework launched in 2020 expanded affordable public internet access.
2. Over 4.10 lakh Wi-Fi hotspots operate across States and Union Territories as of June 2026.

Digital Document Infrastructure

1. Digi Locker introduced secure digital document wallet allowing individuals to store, access, and share authenticated electronic documents.
2. UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New age Governance) provides single window access to services from central, state, and local government bodies.

Common Service Centres

1. CSCs grown from 0.83 lakh centres in 2014 to over 5.01 lakh functional centres by April 2026.
2. These centres improve digital access and delivery of citizen services across rural and urban areas.

Digital Education Platform

1. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) with over 2 crore registered users serves as unified, AI-enabled digital education platform.
2. All States/UTs onboarded hosting 7,497 Energized Textbooks and over 3.74 lakh e-content resources.

E-Governance Revolution

1. E-Governance has revolutionized citizen-government interaction making services more accessible, transparent, and efficient.
2. Initiatives like Mission Karma yogi, Digi Locker, and UMANG App exemplify digital service transformation.

3.Critical Gaps and Priority Areas

The Four Priorities Identified

1. **Expanding affordable broadband and public Wi-Fi** ensuring universal connectivity at affordable costs.
2. **Improving access to computers and shared devices** addressing hardware constraints in low-income areas.
3. **Strengthening digital literacy and skills** enabling meaningful technology use beyond entertainment.
4. **Targeting women, rural households, poorer families, and disadvantaged communities** addressing systematic exclusions.

4.Way Forward

1. **Accelerate Broadband Rollout** – Speed up Bharat Net implementation in remote and tribal areas expanding 4G/5G coverage.

2. **Enhance Digital Literacy** – Scale up digital literacy programs particularly for women, senior citizens, and rural populations.
3. **Bridge Gender Digital Divide** – Implement targeted initiatives improving women's access to mobile phones, internet services, and digital skills training.
4. **Promote Regional Language Content** – Expand digital services and applications in Indian languages enabling broader participation.
5. **Deepen Digital Public Infrastructure** – Expand Aadhaar, UPI, and Digilocker reach ensuring inclusivity and privacy safeguards.
6. **Strengthen Public-Private Partnerships** – Foster collaboration among government, industry, civil society, and academia creating inclusive digital ecosystems.

Source – <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/digital-2-0-access-to-mobiles-up-but-not-empowerment/articleshow/131598964.cms>