



UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5.B

“...enhancing the usage of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women”

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

for ADOLESCENT
GIRLS in INDIA

Log Her In!

INDIA HAS the world's largest adolescent population – **253 million**; almost half of this comprises of girls. Such a large young demographic group can benefit the country "socially, politically and economically". But without access to digital modes and media, this potential remains largely unfulfilled. India's women, especially its adolescent girls, are way behind in having access to digital devices and the internet. A mere one-third of the country's internet users are women. India alone accounts for nearly 50% of the gendered digital divide in the world. *THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2017. Children in a Digital World*" (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), December 2017), https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2017_ENG_WEB.pdf. This gap has widened alarmingly during the

COVID-19 crisis. The lockdown in India has affected 158 million girl students, destroying their dreams of a formal education and better lives. For most of them, online and digital learning is not even an option.

Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3), in association with Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF), has done a primary survey to understand the yawning digital gap that India's adolescent girls are faced with, at a time when the country is investing in digital transformation. C3 also partnered with Feminist Approach to Technology (FAT) to gain insights from girls who are digitally empowered to have a holistic view.

We offer you here a brief glimpse of this survey and its findings.

THE SURVEY

COVERAGE



Period

August-October 2020



Randomised collection through **tele-sampling**



4,100 respondents



10 states and **29** districts



Four stakeholder groups

- o **2,220** adolescent girls (aged 12-20 years)
- o **630** family members of adolescent girls (between the age groups of 25-70 years)
- o **617** teachers and educators (primary, secondary and higher-secondary)
- o **633** representatives of community organisations (government employees, NGO workers, private employees and self-employed workers)

OBJECTIVES

To identify, analyse and document issues and challenges in digital access and empowerment of adolescent girls, more in the light of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 circumstances, in critical areas of access to education, health, knowledge-skills, capacities and digital access

To propose action-oriented recommendations to policy framers and grant makers and implementors at the State and National levels to look into the core empowerment aspects in 'Digital for Girls', as a priority in bridging gaps in gender digital divide at a very fundamental stage in life – the stage of adolescence.

Understanding the gendered digital divide

THE 5 DIMENSIONS

The adolescent girl in India does not have, or has limited...

ACCESS to digital devices

ACCESS to stable cost-effective connectivity

ACCESS to relevant need-based content

ACCESS to a friendly supportive family and environment

ACCESS to safe credible digital media literacy and skills



WHAT DOES THE SURVEY TELL US?

On ACCESS to digital devices

There is a serious crisis of access to digital devices for adolescent girls in India

- Access differs from state to state. 65% of adolescent girls in Karnataka enjoy easy access; less than 10% in some states.
- Boys have easier access. In Haryana, there is a huge gender gap, while Telangana has a 12% gap.
- Family attitudes and biases restrict the time given to girls to access a digital device – 42% of girls are allowed to a mobile phone for less than an hour in a day.
- Financial affordability is a cause for not having access. 71% of the girls do not own a mobile phone because they cannot afford it. 81% of families say they cannot afford one, while 79% do not have access to a computer at home.
- Access to digital modes in community facilities like schools, community centres and internet cafés is limited – 83% of the girls get less than an hour's access in a week.

“Another difficulty is that they say you are very young and you shouldn't be using a phone. Your brother needs the phone. They also say that you go to college every day, so study from there only. There's no need to study from online classes. This is also one of the reasons that many don't get mobile phones.”

17 YEARS, JHARKHAND (FROM FAT)

On ACCESS to stable cost-effective connectivity

- Financial constraint is a key reason for lack of access
- 84% of girls do not have the money to spend on internet access.
- In Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Maharashtra, most people do not spend more than INR 300 for internet connectivity in a month.

On ACCESS to relevant need-based content

- Majority agree that girls need access to relevant online content. But they don't get it
- 91% of parents agree that "access to online content is necessary for knowledge and information", but 42% of them do not have this access.
- Use of internet cafes to access content is the highest in Haryana – 9%!

On ACCESS to a friendly and supportive family and environment

- Many parents and families shy away from giving digital access to girls. They feel it is "unsafe" and "unhealthy"
- 65% of teachers and 60% of community organisations say that being a girl is a factor in accessing digital technology – most parents feel a mobile phone is an "unhealthy distraction" for an adolescent girl.

On ACCESS to safe, credible digital media literacy and skills

- Digital literacy and skills are lacking among girls
- 32% of adolescent girls only know how to "receive calls" on a mobile. 26% know how to "use features like clock, calculator, torch and other offline apps". A mere 15% know how to use "online apps like WhatsApp and Facebook".
- 16% of parents said their daughters had no knowledge of computers. 38% of the girls do not "know how to use MS Word, Excel or PPT".
- Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal provide a better tech environment at colleges/schools to support girls; Assam stands at the bottom.

“First of all the neighbours usually scold us for using Smartphone and they think that it is not at all useful for us. I also see that daughters of the neighbours are really scared of their parents. They don't get freedom, and they crush their dreams because of their parents and the society though they have the capacity for doing big things.”

17 YEARS, BIHAR (FROM FAT)



+ OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

“Government should provide facilities for girls to make digital media easy to them. They should give free Wi-Fi in every home, and they should at least give one phone in every family so that people can use it.”

17 YEARS, DELHI (FROM FAT)

“I want to request the Government to open the tech centers in the areas where girls can reach easily. Girls who reside in remote villages cannot come to the cities to attend tech centre classes. So, they should be taught in their villages.”

17 YEARS, JHARKHAND (FROM FAT)

ADOPT a targeted approach towards investing in digital inclusion and empowerment of adolescent girls, with the focus on girls both in and out of schools and institutional settings, and in rural, tribal, minority and underdeveloped clusters.

ENVISAGE a gendered digital approach – collect and analyse gender-disaggregated information, build evidence on the basis of digitally inclusive gender-sensitive data in rural and urban settings, and use this data to shape a ‘measuring toolkit’ for gender digital divide.

BUILD sustainable digital safety nets – provide financial assistance, better infrastructure, sustained connectivity and accessible digital facilities in community institutions.

PRIORITIZE last mile affordable connectivity in the deprived villages, panchayats and blocks.

STRENGTHEN e-learning in public schools to boost girls’ motivation, determination and aspiration to complete their education and pursue goals for self and growth, as well as to address gender biases at the home and community levels.

ENCOURAGE an attitudinal shift in parents and families through counselling sessions and online/offline workshops.

ESTABLISH regular short-term digital skill building programs to train girls to critically gauge credibility and safety of online content; and to learn job-oriented skills which would enable them to optimally utilise job and entrepreneurial opportunities.

CREATE a useful and safe content and digital space by legally mandating it, and training girls to watch out against online abuse.

FOSTER multi-stakeholder partnerships with industry representatives, private actors, and the civil society to ensure affordable digital access for girls.

DESIGN and implement a well-thought out policy framework, with national- and state-level interventions, that can help embed digital elements as core empowerment necessities in education, health and skill development.



The need of the hour is a holistic gendered digital approach that calls for multi stakeholder partnership and investment for digital inclusion. It is critical to focus on girls in both in and out of school/institutional settings who are from vulnerable communities with barely any access to devices or last mile internet. This will create avenues for more advanced learning such as AI and ML, breaking the female underrepresentation in STEM. So, it's time we #LogHerIn.

DR. APARAJITA GOGOI

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There is a serious discrimination against women in general and girls in particular, when it is a matter of access to education. Covid19 has highlighted the deep cesspool of the digital exclusion of girls but through data and insights we wanted to bring forward how intense the effort is required to overcome gender digital divide to enable our girls with digital access.

MR OSAMA MANZAR

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