

Bridging the Digital Divide: Insights from India's First CAMS Survey

Introduction: Digital Equity in Focus

India's ambitious Digital India initiative hinges on inclusive access to the Internet and digital literacy. The recently released *Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey (CAMS)*, conducted by NSSO (2022–23), provides the first wide-scale dataset on digital access and skills across socio-economic and demographic strata in India.

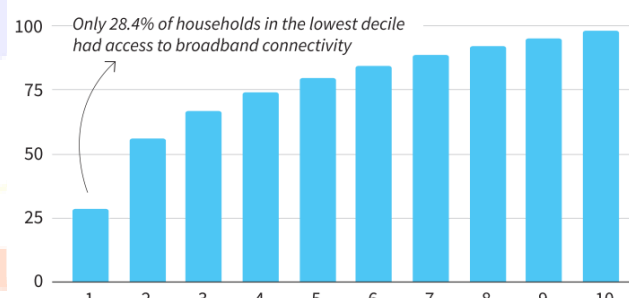
Key Findings from CAMS

1. Internet Access and Coverage

- **Nationwide Broadband Access:**
 - 76.3% of Indian households have broadband Internet.
 - Urban: 86.5%; Rural: 71.2%.
- **State Variations:**
 - 90% connectivity in Delhi, Goa, Mizoram, Manipur, Sikkim, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh.
 - <70% in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Caste Disparities in Access:**
 - General category: 84.1%;
 - OBC: 77.5%, SC: 69.1%, ST: 64.8%.
- **Economic Inequality in Connectivity:**
 - Bottom 10% income group: 71.6% lack broadband.
 - Top 10%: Only 1.9% lack broadband.
 - Access increases consistently with higher MPCE deciles.



Chart 1: The chart shows the broadband connectivity of households according to the decile classes of Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (in %)



2. Mobile Phone Penetration and Usage

- **Ownership:**
 - 94.2% rural and 97.1% urban households own mobile/telephone connections.
- **Usage:**
 - Urban (15+): 92.4% use mobile phones; Rural: 83.9%.
 - Disparity in exclusive use (calls/Internet) among women and deprived sections.
 - Example: Only 25.3% rural women (general category) are exclusive users.

Table 2: Proportion of the population who use any mobile phone with an active SIM card exclusively for making calls or accessing the Internet

Social group	Rural (%)		Urban (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
GEN	45.8	25.3	69.9	51.2
OBC	41.1	20.6	63.3	41.3
SC	35.4	16.4	54.5	33.3
ST	35.6	15.5	61.3	43.9

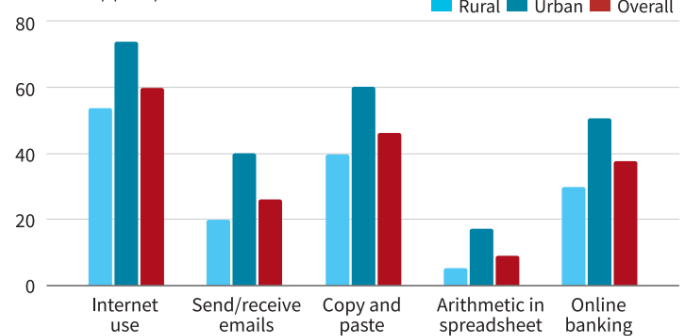
3. Network Quality

- **Mobile Technology Access:**
 - 4G usage: 50%+ in rural; 70%+ in urban.
 - 40.4% still use older tech (below 4G).
 - 5G access is negligible.

Digital Skills Proficiency

- **Basic Skills (15+ years):**
 - Internet use: Rural 53.6%, Urban 74%.
 - Emailing: Rural 20%, Urban 40%.
 - Copy-paste tasks: Rural 40%, Urban 60%.
 - Arithmetic in spreadsheets: Very low.
 - Online banking: 37.8% overall.

Chart 3: Select digital skills of the rural and urban populations of India (15 years and above) (in %)



Way Ahead

1. **Subsidised Internet Access:**
Enable universal broadband by subsidising connections for the bottom economic deciles.
2. **Targeted Digital Literacy Programs:**
Focus on SCs, STs, women, and low-income rural communities to close digital skill gaps.
3. **Gender-Inclusive Digital Training:**
Encourage mobile and Internet use among women with culturally sensitive outreach.
4. **Upgrade Infrastructure:**
Expand 4G/5G coverage in underserved rural and tribal regions.
5. **Integrate ICT in Education Curricula:**
Teach core digital skills (e.g., spreadsheets, email, banking) from early grades.

Conclusion

The CAMS survey highlights both achievements and digital inequities in India's connectivity and skills landscape. While the digital base is expanding, structural barriers—linked to caste, gender, geography, and income—persist. Addressing these through targeted policy interventions is essential to fulfilling SDG 4 and ensuring that no one is left behind in India's digital journey.