

DATA FOR DEVELOPMENT

India Human Development Survey Forum | July 2026

A monthly update of socio-economic developments in India by the IHDS research community



The Evolving Landscape of Digital Inclusion in India

How is India equipped to embrace an increasingly digital world? India has made tremendous progress in mobile connectivity, but next-level challenges remain. A collaborative report by NCAER and the [Women in Digital Economy Network \(WiDEN\)](#) at [The Quantum Hub \(TQH\)](#), using the India Human Development Survey-Wave III (2022-24), a nationwide survey covering 47,473 households, explores what India has achieved and what frontiers remain to be conquered.

Read the full report [here](#).

KEY FINDINGS

Near-Universal Household Mobile Penetration

Mobile phone ownership is nearly universal in India, with 95.1% of households reporting owning of at least one mobile device. Access to advanced digital devices such as smartphones, computers, laptops, and tablets, reveal a more unequal landscape thus limiting advanced usage.

The Mobile-Only Internet

Most households (71.4%) access the internet through mobile devices, making mobile devices the primary and often the only gateway to digital connectivity. However, access to fixed broadband and other high-quality internet connections remains limited.

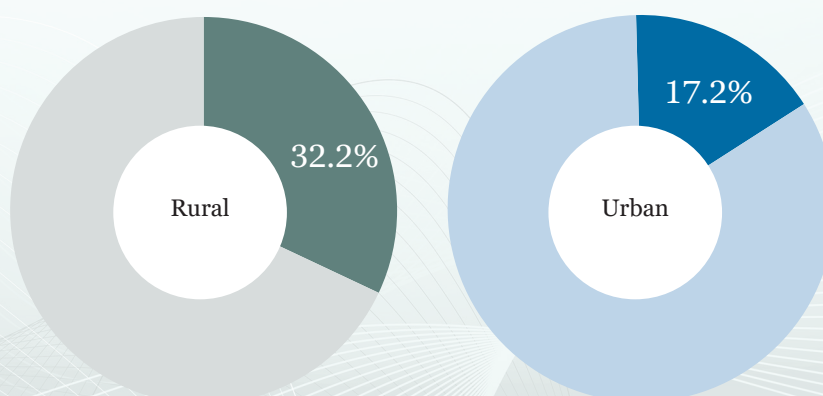
Figure 1: Device ownership and internet connectivity in urban and rural households

	 HHs owning mobile phone	 HHs owning smartphone	 Internet use through mobile device	 HHs owning computer/laptop	 HHs owning tablet
India	95.1%	74.8%	71.4%	8.0%	2.3%
Urban	97.3%	85.0%	80.8%	14.9%	3.7%
Rural	94.1%	70.1%	67.0%	4.7%	1.7%

Gaps in Internet Connectivity

Despite rapid growth in internet connectivity, more than one in four households (27.5%) remain offline with substantial rural-urban variation.

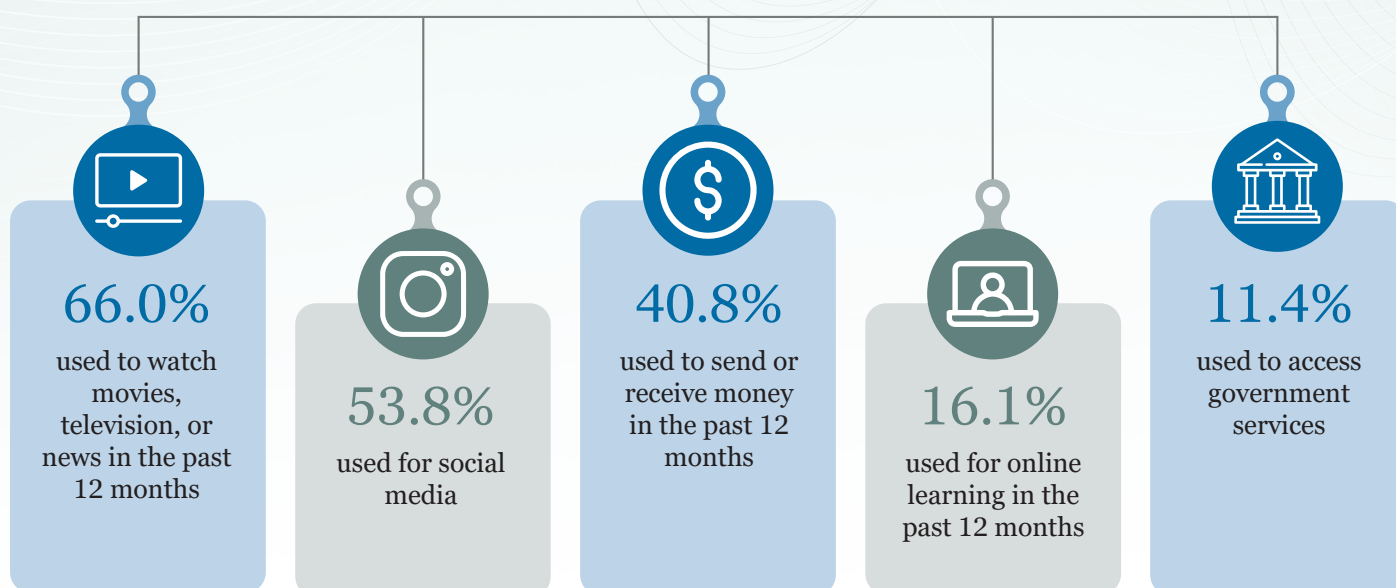
Figure 2: Households lacking internet access



Digital Use Skewed Towards Entertainment

While internet access has expanded rapidly, meaningful digital inclusion depends on how households use the internet. Among connected households, entertainment dominates internet use.

Figure 3: How households use the internet



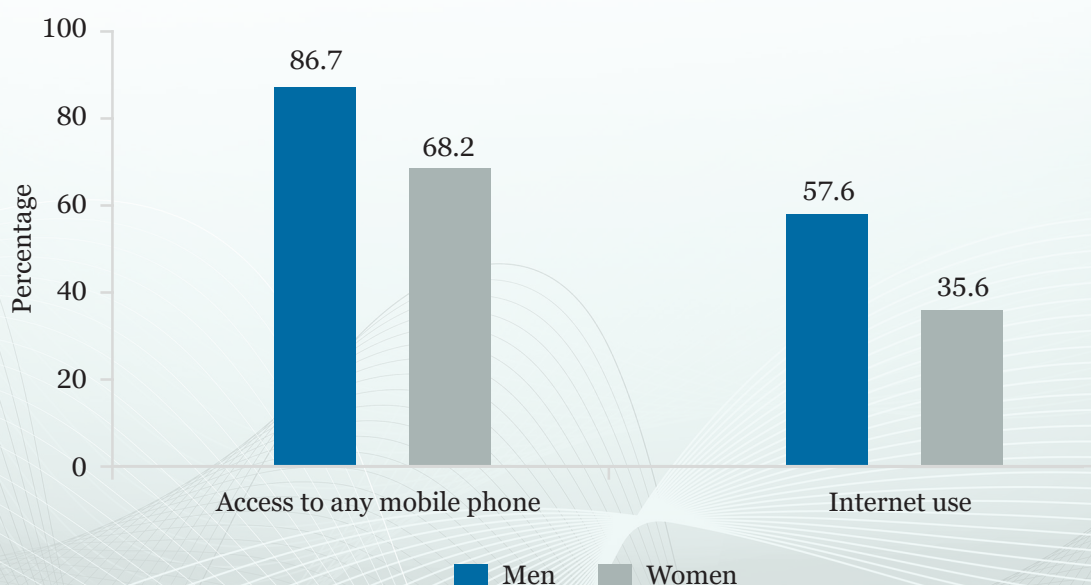
Dependence on Intermediaries for Internet Use

Digital inclusion depends not only on access but also on the ability to use digital technologies independently. Nearly, one in five households (20.4%) that use digital services still require assistance from someone outside the household.

Gender Digital Divide

Women consistently lag behind men across all digital indicators. Women from social groups- Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Muslim communities report significantly lower levels of internet use, reflecting multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion.

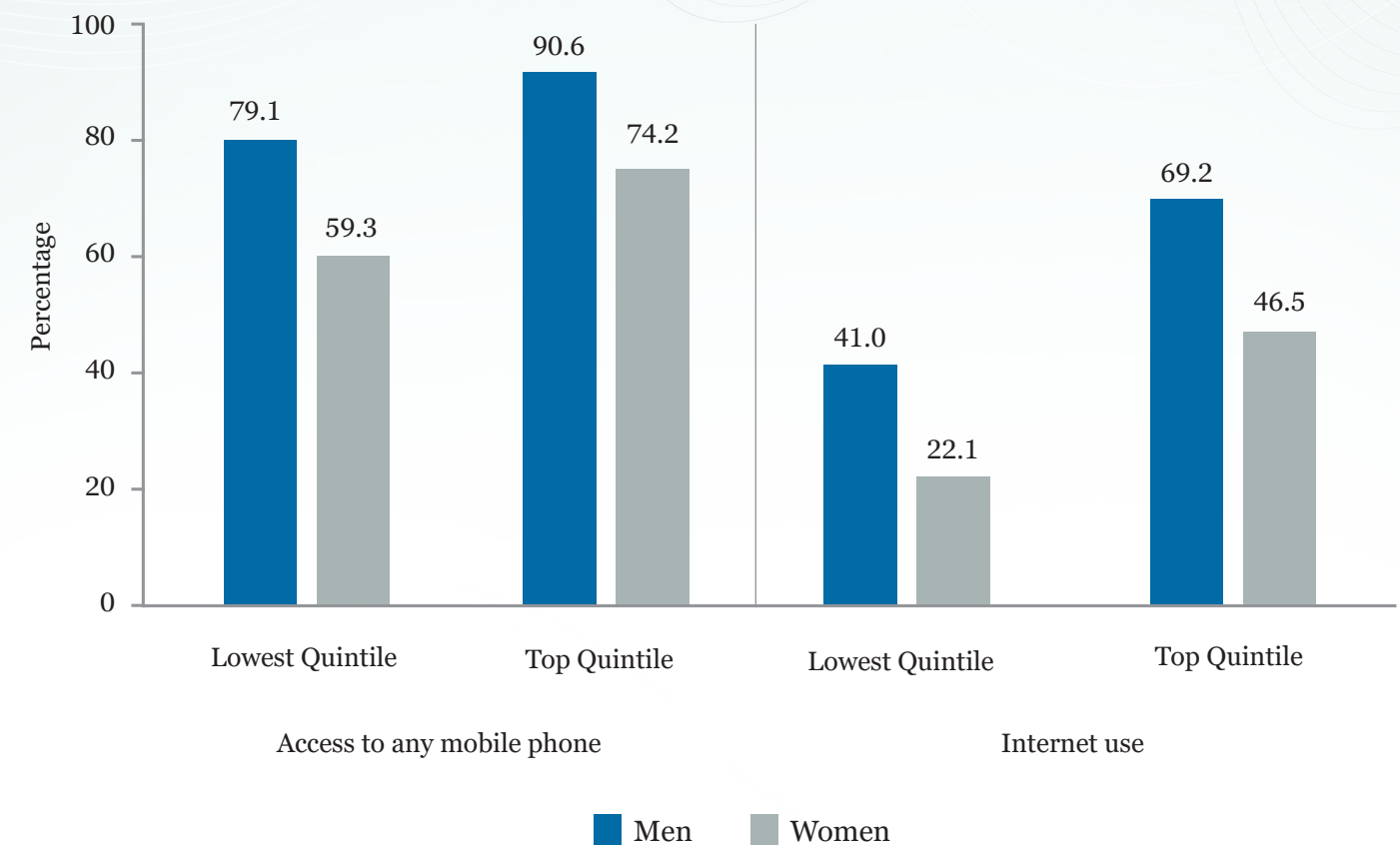
Figure 4: Digital divide by gender (persons aged 15-59 years)



The Poorest Women Fall Furthest Behind

Although rising household economic status narrows the gender gap, substantial disparities persist even among higher economic groups.

Figure 5: Digital divide by economic groups for men and women (persons aged 15-59 years)



Children and Elderly in the Digital World

Access to mobile phone and internet use varies sharply by age. Parental education emerges as a strong lever of children’s digital engagement.

Figure 6: Access to mobile phone and internet use for children and elderly

 Age	 Access to any mobile phone	 Internet use
 Children (13-16 years)	65.3%	37.8%
 Elderly 60+	42.5%	9.4%

The Road Ahead



Connecting the unconnected; improving connection quality

- Affordable connectivity
- Reliable networks
- Efficient digital services
- Access to diverse devices



Building assisted pathways for older adults

- Local support
- Door step assistance
- Design age-friendly services



Investing in digital capabilities, especially among children

- Digital literacy in schools
- Digital access for girls
- Parental digital awareness



Treating women's digital inclusion as a policy goal

- Beyond access
- Intra-household inclusion
- Gender norms

Meet the leading authors of the report



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Standing L-R: Ms. Harshita Vaddadi, Ms. Garima Agarwal, Dr Dibyasree Ganguly, Dr Pallavi Choudhuri, Mr. Manish Sabharwal, Dr Sonalde Desai, Ms. Aparajita Bharti, and Mr. Suresh Goyal at the launch of the report, “The Evolving Landscape of Digital Inclusion in India”, 5th June 2026, NCAER Campus.

Read the full report [here](#).

Recent Publications using IHDS data

Aktas, A., & Poblete-Cazenave, M. (2026). Reducing Health and Gender Inequalities in India through Clean Cooking Technologies: A Scenario-Based Analysis. *Environmental Research: Health*.

Chhabra, N. (2026). Cross-Border Gender Systems? Employment Outcomes of Asian Indian Immigrants in the United States and Canada. Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.

Chowdhuri, M., & Gupta, S. (2026). The True Measure of Digital Inclusion is How Effectively People use Opportunities Offered. *Down To Earth*.

Deshpande, A. (2026). Caste, Class and Stratification in India. In T. Logan (Ed.), *The Economics of Race and Stratification*. University of Chicago Press.

Guha Sarkar, B., Jaikumar, S., Kumar Gurugubelli, P., & Goyal, T. (2026). From Access to Agency: ICT Usage, Psychological Empowerment, and Health Outcomes among Rural Women in Emerging Economies. *Health Marketing Quarterly*.

Jain, A. V., & Borate, A. (2026). Leveraging Networks to Access Basic Services: Understanding Preference for Patronage and Collective Action Networks Based on Housing Precarity. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 13, 102614.

Motkuri, V., & Mishra, R. N. (2026). Labouring for Household Human Capital and Family Mobility: A Perspective on Changing Rural Female Labour Participation in India. *IASSI Quarterly: Contributions to Indian Social Science*, 45(2), 392-423.

Mukherjee, M. (2026) Stuck in the Fields: How Rising Temperatures Deepen Gender Inequality in Rural India. *WIDER Working Paper 2026/73*. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.

Philip, A., & Joseph, E. (2026). Financial Freedom of Women in India: A Data-Driven Analysis of Labour Force Participation, Financial Inclusion and Persistent Barriers. *International Journal of Arts and Social Science*, 9(6), 27-37.

Singhania, D., & Roy Chowdhury, S. (2026). Women as Teammates: Gender Composition of Village Councils and Policy Outcomes in India. *Local Government Studies*.

Sreekumar, G., & Mandal, S. K. (2026). Do the Farm Households Spend Their Remittances for Agricultural Investment? Empirical Evidence from India. *The Journal of Development Studies*.

About IHDS

The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) began as a nationally representative, multi-topic survey of 41,554 households in 1,503 villages and 971 urban neighbourhoods across India. The first round of interviews were completed in 2004-05; the Data is publicly available via ICPSR. The second round reinterviewed most of these households in 2011-12 (N = 42,152), and data for the same are available via ICPSR. Fieldwork for IHDS-III was undertaken in 2022-24, and data is currently being cleaned and processed.

The IHDS-III has been jointly conducted by researchers from the University of Maryland, the National Council of Applied Economic Research, Indiana University and the University of Michigan.

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