

Gender Divide in Digital India: the policy disconnect

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The 2020s has been envisioned as a decade of “ambitious action” for delivery of the SDGs by 2030. A look at India’s regional dashboard on the targets tracked misses the indicator of enhancing technology for women empowerment. The age of the digital revolution carries the risk of leaving millions behind if policymaking fails to place gender digital divide at the center stage. Women who continue to trail men on many aspects of quality of life in India, face prospects of greater exclusion and inequalities in the absence of digital empowerment.

This study analyses the extent to which gender digital divide concerns have been mainstreamed in government policymaking and budgeting. Based on a qualitative analysis of government policy documents and budget statements, we created a scorecard on efforts made towards addressing four key barriers around gender digital exclusion, namely – accessibility, motivations, online safety and

skills. The extent of government mainstreaming of these concerns is assessed on four parameters – mention in policy documents, target setting and tracking, earmarking of budget and conduct of meaningful impact assessments.

We found that digital divide policies continue to have a uni-dimensional focus on the rural-urban gap. Sex-disaggregated data collection on ICT is almost non-existent which renders gender budgeting ineffectual. Consistent policy focus is more visible on the challenges of digital literacy and motivations. However, the scores are lower for the other two challenges. Particularly, transparency in setting and tracking gender-specific targets as well as effective conduct and follow-up of impact assessment need urgent attention.