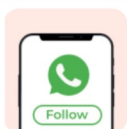


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India's 660 million population unconnected: Broadband Commission

The finding also said that India's fourth-generation or 4G networks were more skew towards urban regions.



Muntazir Abbas, • ETTelecom

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NEW DELHI: India had 660 million unconnected population with merely 16.8% mobile



broadband penetration in 2016 among the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) member countries, a new

Broadband Commission finding revealed.

The study pointed out that 49.5% or 660 million people in India were mobile unconnected by the end of 2016, and indicated that only 1.4% Indians had a fixed broadband connection while a total of 29.5% individuals use Internet.

The Commission, however, advocated leveraging mobile as a tool to facilitate Internet access.

India's sectoral watchdog Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has however asked the government to use alternative methods in order to increase broadband uptake in the country, and suggested to leverage satellite connectivity and cable television infrastructure.

With around 62% of all people not online residing in the Asia & the Pacific region. China is the world's largest Internet market, with around 700 million Internet users, followed by India with 355 million, the ITU-driven report said.

Co-authored by Phillippa Biggs with Youlia Lozanova, the new report points out broadband as a key driver for economical growth with Information Communication Technology (ICT), an enabler to accelerate human progress.

The finding also said that India's fourth-generation or 4G networks were more skewed towards urban regions.

“In India, for example, 2G is the main technology in use in rural areas, while 3G and 4G are available mainly in towns,” it said.

In terms of locations where 3G networks are being upgraded to 4G networks, there is evidence to suggest that 3G and 4G networks are being rolled out primarily in urban areas, the report added.

4G-LTE subscriptions, according to it, will make up the largest portion of overall mobile subscriptions globally, as India and emerging markets in the Middle East and Africa catch up with the rest of the world in terms of average penetration rates.

GSMAi, however, forecasts that 5G connections are set to surpass 1 billion by 2025.

The Commission also indicated that the Indian government, fast-tracking a policy the usage of high-frequency spectrum bands to ensure regulations are in place in time for Indian operators to use the airwaves for 5G technology.

The study also pointed out low capital expenditure by telecom service providers in 2016 in developing economies including China and India.

With the disruptive foray of Reliance Jio Infocomm in September last, Indian telcos revenues, were however, on a constant decline which some analysts attribute as a main reason to low spend.

“In developing markets in 2016, there was a particularly strong decline in capex of almost 10% year-on-year,” it said.

GSMAi predicts that capital expenditure in developing market will continue to fall over the medium-term, as declines in China and macro-

economic pressures in other developing economies offset the growth experienced in markets such as India.

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