Digital Divide

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Definition & Meaning

The American Library Association's Office for Information Technology Policy defines the digital divide as the differences due to geography, race, economic status, gender and physical ability in access to information through the Internet, and other information technologies and services; and in the skills, knowledge, and abilities to use information, the Internet and other technologies.

- The term "digital divide" also to refers to the disparities between societies and nations. The phrase "digital divide" refers to the unequal and disproportionate of development in societies in having access to digital infrastructure and services.

- The term digital divide refers to the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital and information technology, and those without this access. It encompasses both physical access to technology hardware and, more broadly, skills and resources which allow for its use.

- The term global digital divide refers to differences in technology access between countries. Essentially, this means the divide between those who have access to digital technology and those who do not.

Initiatives in Bridging the Digital Divide

- **Kisan Call centre:** The Department of Agriculture & Cooperation (DAC), Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India launched Kisan Call Centers on January 21, 2004 across the country to deliver extension services to the farming community.
- The purpose of these call centers is to respond to issues raised by farmers, instantly, in the local language. There are call centers for every state which are expected to handle traffic from any part of the country.
- Queries related to agriculture and allied sectors are being addressed through these call centers.
- By a single call the farmer reaches an agriculture graduate or expert who would be able to respond to his queries and problems instantly.
- In case the respondent at the Level-I is not able to satisfy the farmer, the call can be taken on a conference to an expert at Level-II sitting in a specified place in the State in an institution for giving advice.
- In the event where the farmer is not fully satisfied, his problems would be recorded, solved at Level-III at the highest level at the Nodal centre and he will get further advice through post or by visit of extension workers.
- The services would be available round the clock. The functioning of the Levels I, II & III. While during the working hours there would be immediate response whereas beyond working hours and in holidays, the call would be recorded and the queries are answered by post.
- This is a wonderful effort made by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India to bridge the gap between the actual information resource and the user by using the phone.

Life Line India

- A charitable organization working to promote human rights and sustainable development across the globe – to explore ideas for a telephone based information service to enable farmers to record a question and, soon after, retrieve a recorded reply.

- Life Lines India was launched in November 2006.

- Coverage currently extends to 3000 villages and an average of 350 calls to the service is being received each day.

- A database of over 88,000 ‘frequently asked questions’ has been created.

- Prompt service to farmers, explore the opportunity to use the platform for other applications such as ‘LifeLines for Education’.
- Initially the LifeLines India service covered 85 villages, principally in the region of **Bundelkhand**. It is designed to provide the farming communities with access to expert advice on agriculture and animal husbandry problems.
- All the farmers need to do is dial the LifeLines India number from a community telephone. This could be a village phone shop (kiosk), or a mobile phone
- Callers are helps with the service name; “Soochna Se Samadaan” (Information is Solution) and prompted to record their query on an automated voicemail system. LifeLines India has proven the value of digital inclusion, educating the rural users to use technology to access advice and learning to improve the future for their families and the local community.

Bhoomi Project:

- The Bhoomi Project of Karnataka state covers for farmers and holds records of land ownership.

- Bhoomi centres are located all over the state. Any land record can be reviewed through a touch screen at these kiosks; the project can also be used as a databank for various projects of public and private sector organizations.

- The project has won the 2002 Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management award for creating "self content governance and opening up new frontiers."

- With the success of the Bhoomi project other states of India, viz. Tamil Naidu, Maharastra and Madhya Pradesh have started evolving models based on Bhoomi in their respective states.

Gyandoot Project

- Gyandoot is an intranet in Dhar district connecting rural cybercafes catering to the everyday needs of the masses. This web site of GYANDOOT is an extension of Gyandoot intranet, for giving global access.

- Gyandoot is the first ever project in India for a rural information network in the Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh which has the highest percentage of tribes and dense forest
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- Every village has a computer centre or "soochnalayas" at prominent market places or major roads. People can easily log in and complain or request information on crops, forest fields, water resources, etc. of the district.

- Twenty–one village Panchayats in the District have been connected with computers or information centres; several private sector information centres called "Soochnalays" have also been opened. One such popular centre is in "Manwar Agriculture Mandi," where the latest crop prices are made available to the farmers. The land records of a few tehsils of district Dhar are also available on these computers. Also, Internet connections have been provided to get global information by linking to the World Wide Web. The government of Madhya Pradesh is attempting to make Gyandoot Project a great success by extending it to other districts.

- The state is in the process of starting 7,800 IT kiosks with the help of the private sector. To train common people to be computer literate, 7,500 "Jan Shksha" public instruction centres have also been identified, and policy is being formulated to bring IT to the common people's need and benefit. Efforts are also being made by the government to involve public libraries in this project.

TDIL

The department of information technology initiated the TDIL (Technology Development for Indian Languages) with the aim of developing information processing tools and techniques to facilitate human-machine interaction without language barrier; creating and accessing multilingual knowledge resources; and integrating them to develop innovative user products and services.

“Grameen Sancahar Sewak” project,

- The “Grameen Sancahar Sewak” project, in a bid to promote telecom services for rural people using WLL (Wireless in Local Loop) technology.

- The project has been conceptualised to provide accessibility to public telephone service to rural populations at their doorstep by worldwide Web technology.

- The scheme would be implemented through the Gameen Dak Sewak (Village Post delivery agents).

CARD Project

- The Computer Aided Administration of Registration Department (CARD) project initiated by the government of Andhra Pradesh illustrates the effective use of IT to improve citizen–government interface. Under this project, land registration offices through out Andhra Pradesh are now provided with computerized counters.
- Citizens can now complete registration formalities without much hassle.

Lokamitra/Smart Project

- Himachal Pradesh (HP), the hill state of the country, has initiated the Lokamitra project with grants from NABARD to provide the general public, especially those living in distant rural areas, easy access to government information and facilities of e–governance to their door steps. Lokamitra “Soochnalaya Kendras” (information centres) have been set up in 25 panchayat areas run by unemployed youth.

- These Kendras provide current information relating to the district and government information.

E–Chaupals Project

- The Project launched in the year 2000 has been quite popular in rural areas of India.

- The e–chaupals enables rural people to access information in their local languages on crops and market prices.

- Around 2,700 e–chaupals provides services to farmers in five states of the country, *viz. Maharashtra, MP, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and* Andhra Pradesh.

Role of Libraries & Information Centers

- Libraries, with their computers wired for the Internet and available free for public use,
- Personal help to access technologies
- Libraries advice to improve the quality of the public services and health care provided to the community.
- Suggest better ICT and provide short term trainings
- Resources for school and people
- Education

Challenges to Bridging the Digital Divide

- **Infrastructural barriers**
- **Literacy and skills barriers**
- **Economic barriers:** In India the ability to purchase or rent the tool for access to digital information is less. The lower income group does not have discretionary money to spend on cyber–cafes or to get Internet connectivity on their own to access digital information.

- **Content barriers:** The Internet allows ideas and information to be shared freely from citizen to citizen globally. Irrelevant contents are available

- **Language barriers**

Any Question