LOCATING WOMEN IN DIGITAL INDIA: A STUDY ON ICT POLICY AND GRASSROOTS PERSPECTIVES FROM ASSAM

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CHAPTER-6

SUMMING-UP, SUGGESTIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The present research attempted to evaluate the issue of gender digital divide in context of India and Assam from two directions. From one direction, the intention was to look at whether ICT policy in India was gender sensitive. The purpose was to find out if ICT policy in India considered women as separate focus area. Was there any emphasis on creating women specific services in policy? Was there any gender specific agenda from the government's side? Whether mechanisms and strategies identified in policy were appropriated to address the larger issue of gender digital divide? In short, the motive was to understand whether ICT policy in India catered to the voices, issues, concerns and difficulties of grassroots women with regards to their access and use of ICTs. From another direction, the study attempted to understand to what extent ICT implementation was adjusting to the local hues, structures and needs of grassroots community members. The enquiry tried to understand whether women at the grassroots were able to access and use technologies. Whether such implementation came out as an asset or liability at the grassroots? It was attempted to understand whether decentralized implementation was actually happening at the grassroots? Again if technology was made available at the grassroots, whether it fit into the realm of operations or activities of grassroots women? If it did not fit, were there enough opportunities and ways to re-appropriate those to fit into the situation? Whether grassroots women accrued benefits out of ICTs? If they did not accrue, why did they not do so?

At a broader level, the study sought to assess the efficiency of the country's ICT policy framework to guard and endorse women's right to digital inclusion, and in creating possibilities to facilitate that inclusion. In this chapter it is attempted to summarize the insights gained from the investigation into these questions and in conclusion, present a few suggestions towards a more gender sensitive and inclusive ICT policy framework in India juxtaposed with women's grassroots realities.

6.1. Digital India and the 'Woman' Question

According to the annual Networked Readiness Index (NRI) 2016 report released by Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF), India ranked 91st position on a global list of countries in terms of their readiness for transition to a digitized economy and society. India's position on the list receded for the fourth year in a row, from 68th in 2013, 83rd in 2014 and 89th in 2015 (The Hindu, 2018). The index, forming part of the WEF's Global Information Technology Report, measures countries' success in creating the conditions necessary for a transition to a digitized economy and society.

Digital India is often considered as the biggest and most robust e-governance initiative in India. Apart from being a prominent programme of the Government of India, Digital India is a vision that encompasses the ideas of development, opportunity creation and nation building. However, with regards to women, there is an absence of strong commitment towards gender equality in the articulation of the Digital India vision. For instance, the Digital India programme, positions CSCs as the primary outlets for delivery of government services and claim that such e-governance delivery points are creating immense possibilities for grassroots women. But there is neither established evidence nor consistent data to ensure that grassroots women have been largely benefitted through such centres. Also, there is no clear statistics which says that the CSC scheme has actually promoted women's acceptance of the internet and other e-governance services. As one of the senior bureaucrats from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India shared:

> It is indeed true that there is no clear-cut substantial data in order to accurately assess if the Common Service Centres have led to women's digital empowerment or if such grassroots delivery points of e-governance have actually been able to influence women's access and use of the internet. There is no record-keeping mechanism to gauge a gender-disaggregated data on the number of women visiting the centres; the facilities availed by them or so on.

Gender-differentiated data and information must be envisioned and made available for policy makers to be able to assess the situation and develop appropriate, evidence-based responses and policies. Such data must be collected and analyzed within the policy-making process, ideally covering several years to track changes and take corrective action. Without data on the actual access and usage of ICTs, it will be difficult to strategize inclusive growth for all communities through deployment of ICTs (OECD, n.d.).

From the study it came out that there is a visible lack of articulation regarding focused initiatives to enhance ICT skills of grassroots women within the overall ICT policy framework in India. However, there were officials who thought that the Digital India programme was gender-focused and initiatives like PMGDISHA could largely benefit women. For instance, an officer working with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) opined:

> With regards to women, a lot of energy is already put in to tackle issues like girl education, maternal health, dowry, female infanticide, poverty and so on. The concept of digital revolution is relatively new in India. I agree that the Digital India programme has been largely envisioned as a general vision. But there are initiatives like PMGDISHA which can particularly benefit women. As the other issues are taken care of, the Government will concentrate more aggressively on digital empowerment of women.

In this regard, it is important here to mention that many policy makers dismiss the concern for gender and ICT in developing countries on the basis that development should deal with basic needs first. However, it is not a choice between one and the other. ICT can be an important tool in meeting women's basic needs and can provide the access to resources to lead women out of poverty (Gillwald, et al., 2010; Huyer and Mitter, 2003). Even if there are initiatives like the PMGDISHA within the digital India vision, there can be serious questions raised concerning the actual impact of such initiatives on women. For instance, the eligibility criteria mandate for trainees under PMGDISHA is that trainees have to be from households where no one between the ages of 14-60 years is digitally literate. Also, only one member per household is to be trained, preferably a woman (Ministry of Electronics and

Information Technology, 2017). Third-party evaluations have also raised serious concerns about such initiatives wherein at ground level, beneficiaries are selected dishonestly, ultimately leading to deserving people getting deprived of the benefits under such initiatives (Jain, 2017).

Moreover, in absence of a gender-inclusive safe space for women at the grassroots level where they can build digital skills over time and learn how to use these skills to access public information and governance services, the vision of digital empowerment for women could not be translated to reality. Also, there has been scarcely any effort on the part of the government to encourage and create opportunities for grassroots women functionaries to engage themselves in the process of creating larger consciousness concerning women's access and use of ICTs at the local governance level.

Again, empowerment studies focuses on social inclusion. The growth of the civil society and participatory development methods at macro levels are mechanisms by which social inclusion and therefore, empowerment could take place (Friedmann 1992; Chambers 1997; Narayan, Chambers, Shah, and Petesch, 2000). For women, it means gaining control of their lives in relation to family, community, and society (Jejeebhoy, 2000). Unfortunately, inclusion of women in ICT policy design, implementation and execution is one of the most neglected aspects within the Digital India programme owing to the lack of appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure women's inclusion in the over-all framework. Women's right to be heard has not been powerfully articulated in the policy. Socioeconomic policies in the post gender mainstreaming era seem to have ended up streaming gender away in policy spaces (Mukhopadhyay, 2004). In the absence of the commitment to empower women through inclusion, any policy vision would remain merely an ambitious vision that sounds robust on paper without much practical implication. This, coupled with a lack of vibrant cross-cutting initiatives among ministries and other agencies; lack of clear articulation with regards to civil society's role towards building larger consciousness and skill enhancement of grassroots women, have ultimately resulted in the digital vision of our country appear unformed and sound empty rhetoric. Even if cross-ministry collaborations like the Digital North East 2022 Vision have been envisaged under the umbrella Digital India vision, in absence of concrete blueprints

for ground level implementation of identified strategies targeting women, there is a high chance that such enterprises might end up large scale disappointments without really impacting any women at the grassroots level.

Feedback garnering from women is again a weak link within ICT policy. Opportunities for consulting women on legislations, public policies, services and resource allocation are almost negligible and there are absolutely no mechanisms enabling women to provide response on public services and policies. Grassroots women are not mandated to be heard in policy planning, design, implementation and evaluation. As a corollary of that, there are not much scope for ground realities and specific needs of grassroots women getting heard and respected in policy. The Community Informatics approach concerns with the development, deployment and management of information systems designed with and by communities to solve their own problems. It highlights the interrelationship between technology and society as a fully democratic and participatory process. In this regard, Chakraborty in 2014 highlighted that the viability of ICT projects in developing nations must be sensitive to social, economic and cultural facets of the community where it is being experimented and aim at sustainability consideration which look at group based solutions rather than individual ones. Communities must be properly involved in the development and sustenance of their own ICT systems which are to be designed in an innovative and flexible manner appropriate for remote locations (Chakraborty, 2014). However, in the study it came out that such a democratic and participatory approach was not adopted in Digital India. The question of offering special attention to women, helping them overcome their individual barriers in accessing technology, and sensitively listening to their demands and perspectives still remain an unexplored area within the Digital India vision.

The Government of India has been constantly emphasizing on bridging the existing digital divide by offering governance and services on demand and providing digital infrastructure, which could lead to digital empowerment of the citizens. However, by creating, developing and fostering knowledge societies in order to decrease the existing divides, the Government of India must create more efficient strategies and programmes to overcome social inequalities and not just provide techno-infrastructure. Social inequalities are indeed a big concern as they influence media

literacy, engagement in political, social, education life, and using the web in participation and collaboration in an online public sphere. They create marginalized groups who do not have access to the internet and therefore at some point will not be able to engage in social, economic and political life.

Again, the presence of public service complaints mechanism such as the 'MyGov.in' platform is also not able to create a user-friendly platform for complaints and perspectives of grassroots women to be heard, since the approach largely remains urban centric. Moreover, there are no established mechanisms through which policy makers can be held accountable to ensure that grassroots women are being listened to within the ICT policy framework. McIver (2003) highlighted that communities need to have a specialized informatics distinct from organizational informatics engaged by governments.

All these gaps speak volume regarding the lack of political will and apathy of country's current ICT policy towards the interests of women as a whole, and specifically the lack of serious commitment to protect grassroots women's right to digital inclusion and empowerment.

6.2. Witnessing Gender Digital Divide: The Question of Contexts

The data collected during fieldwork were analyzed along three dimensions- perceptual dimension, affective dimension and actor dimension. Analysis of the field data along the perceptual dimension highlighted that perception of women functionaries with regard to ICTs differed from district to district. In Jorhat, the women functionaries could perceive ICTs as important to a certain extent. But, in Majuli, women were largely skeptical as to what utility ICTs could have in their lives and towards social change. Again, in Baksa, most women could not relate to the idea that ICTs could be a strong tool of empowerment and hence did not engage in ICTs. In this regard, Amartya Sen in his book 'Development as Freedom' in 1999 argued that development initiatives must be built on 'the idea of the public as an active participant in change, rather than as a passive and docile recipient of instructions or of dispensed assistance'. He underlines the issue that people who experience persistent marginalization many-a-time suppress their desires and subdue their aspirations downwards resulting in a lack of ambition or appetite for

transformation. Socially constructed standards and principles revolving gender, ethnicity, and caste/class are often internalized which adversely impact people's sense of self-efficacy and agency for change. A person may have the impression that trying to alter the situation that limits them is fruitless, that they are not capable of doing that or that people in power who can improve the situation will not listen to their voices (Sen, 1999). Including such deprived communities in digital initiatives therefore requires rigorous strategies specifically designed to address people's depressed sense of political agency.

With regards to perception regarding ICTs, it however came out in the study that when formal education is higher (as seen in the case of Jorhat where many women functionaries were post-graduates), the women showed positive outlook towards using ICTs to a large extent. Whereas, when formal education of women is less (as seen in the cases of Majuli and Baksa where most women functionaries studied only till 10^{th} standard or 10+2 level), the transformative potential of ICTs is not envisioned by women at large. The study hinted that when women were more educated and aware, they were better able to understand the significance of ICTs in development.

Another significant lesson learnt from the study is that the perception of women regarding ICTs to a large extent depended on capacity building initiatives and training of grassroots women (as seen in the district of Jorhat where training programmes resulted in positive perception of women with regard to ICTs). ICT usage demands special skills on part of the user and thereby entails building their capacities. There are digital inequalities that move beyond internet access such as information literacy. Information literacy involves, for example, online search, digital, media and networked literacy or technical and cognitive, critical literacy skills in order to navigate online. However, in this regard, one has to understand that women are historically a deprived section in society. Since ages, women have been largely marginalized which makes them an under-privileged and vulnerable section in society. Hence, it requires a lot more time and effort to build capacity and train women in the 'difficult-to-engage' ICT space and government has a pivotal role to play in this regard. Also, it is more likely to achieve meaningful, and effective results in ICT capacity building for women when it is implemented with close linkages to

civil society, NGOs and other Grassroots Women's Organizations (GWOs). The results are also positive when private players take up innovative projects or support existing ICT projects which have larger affirmative consequences at the grassroots. NGOs and GWOs can influence citizen participation in local e-governance through advocacy, capacity building and education, thereby, creating or reinforcing a digitally connected civil society right at the grassroots level. For instance, it was realized during fieldwork that in the district of Baksa, a project titled 'Internet Saathi' which is a collaborative initiative by Google and Tata Trusts was creating positive impacts by touching the lives of grassroots women. Under the initiative, few women were at first identified by a local NGO called Gramya Vikash Mancha, and then they were provided with basic training particularly in mobile internet. The women volunteers were then assigned to train other women in their vicinity, thus continuing the training process like a chain system. Efforts should focus on increasing number of women studying IT related subjects in formal schooling and seeking IT training outside of school, as well as related areas to help them fully utilize IT skills (Prasad and Sreedevi, 2007).

With regards to the affective dimension, a detailed review of the accounts from the women functionaries in Jorhat highlighted that to a certain extent, women had access to and used ICTs in personal spaces like home and family. Many women also reported that they had learnt technology from their family members like husbands and sons. The male members in families particularly husbands were highly supportive of their wives in using ICTs which is a positive sign. However with regards to Majuli, the study revealed that within the district there were severe infrastructural lapses in the form of poor electricity supply, insufficient computer systems, and poor internet connectivity and so on. There were still remote locations where cellular phone or broadband internet coverage was unavailable. Majuli is an island district and is geographically isolated from mainland Assam. The history of development in Majuli had always been sluggish. Hence, this lapse in connectivity reflected the pre-existing geographical and economic prejudices that the district had been facing for too long. Most women in Majuli during fieldwork informed that they had never used a computer or laptop either at home or office spaces. A few of the women had smartphones, but they did not know how to use it properly.

Again, a detailed review of women's accounts from Baksa reflected that to a limited extent the women in the district had access to ICTs in personal spaces like home and family. But there was a dearth of proper infrastructural facilities within institutional spaces. The VCDC women chairpersons particularly complained about not having dedicated office buildings, adequate man power, regular monthly salary scheme; and travel allowances to carry out official activities smoothly. A thorough review of women's grassroots accounts from Baksa uncovered that pre-existing issues such as poverty, lack of awareness and structural constraints largely stood as barriers for women in accessing and accruing benefits of ICTs. Structural constraints remained particularly in terms of inadequate infrastructural support such as buildings, electricity connection and adequate access to computers and internet connectivity within office spaces. Thus, the study emphasizes that lack of proper resources, basic amenities and infrastructural facilities act as the biggest challenge in women's access and usage of ICTs. However, the study also underlines that it is not only sufficient to establish physical facilities, such as communication networks or computers, but also to ensure that these facilities are utilized by their users to the greatest possible extent. Women's access to and use of ICT is constrained not simply by technological infrastructure, but also by socially constructed gender roles and relations. The capability of women to effectively use information obtained through ICT is dependent on key social factors like literacy, geographic location, mobility and social class (Primo, 2003). This was further understood when the field data was analyzed along the actor dimension.

Analyzing the data along the actor dimension, revealed that the wider context, culture and environment have a crucial role to play in tapping into the possibilities of ICTs for women residing within the district. It is possible to bring forth transformative outcomes when women are respected as individuals and where their capacities are believed in and nurtured; and when there are supporting structures to enable women to engage in ICTs and network with each other, and develop a collective sense of ownership over the process to address issues that matter to them. In Jorhat, it came out that majority of women functionaries performed supervisory role at offices and did not have their own computer or laptop at offices. The functionaries reported that they were less likely to use ICTs in offices due to men assigned to carry out computer related works. Internet or computer-related works

were handled by male members (accountants and other staff members) in the offices. Marxist approach examines the social relations of technology in terms of class and sees women's exclusion from technology as due to the gender division of labour, and the historical and cultural view of technology as masculine. It sees technology as reflecting male power. Again, liberal approach sees the challenge to be improving women's access to technology in a society that is gendered by stereotypical sex roles (Wood, 2000). Again, a comprehensive review of the situation across the district of Majuli revealed that apart from lapses in infrastructure, the women in the district were often judged and criticized if they invested more time and energy in other activities beyond household responsibilities and religious undertakings. The grassroots functionaries remarked about how most community members did not appreciate if women remained busy on their mobile phones or digital technology. All these constraints in the immediate environment ultimately contributed towards less access and usage of ICTs by the women functionaries in the district.

The present study stresses that it is essential to contextualize women's socio-cultural realities and everyday contexts to their access, usage and perceptions of ICTs. In this context, creation of larger consciousness among community members in encouraging women to use technology within family, work and community spaces comes across as an important consideration, as this will create a 'social influence'. The same was outlined as 'social influence' in UTAUT. According to UTAUT, social influence are ways in which individuals change their behavior getting influenced by its surrounding environment. Similarly, when traditional and patriarchal mindsets prevail in society, as in the case of Majuli where women feel they are morally judged for using ICTs or remaining busy with smartphones, or, taunted when they talked with male colleagues over phone, the outcomes of such attitudes of family and community have been witnessed to be discouraging for women towards confidently using ICTs. Moreover, the mentality that women should be restricted to household activities and her prime duty is nurturing family and home stands as an impediment for women in learning digital technology. Thus, it is demonstrated through the study that undesirable family and community attitude leads to negative outcomes with regards to women's access and usage of ICTs.

Again, most women across the three districts informed about their fear and discomfort in using technology. For instance, while there were women who commented that online banking was difficult; others expressed about their fear of transacting online. Many preferred the offline mode of transacting to the online mode due to fear of technology. This can be connected to several studies which highlight that men's ICT usage decisions are more strongly influenced by their usefulness, while women's decisions to use ICT are influenced more by their perceptions of the ease of use of ICT (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis, 2003; Venkatesh, Thong and Xu, 2012).

Further, across the three districts, it came out that often women were the last members to purchase a smartphone for self-use. If a particular household was able to afford one internet-enabled smartphone, it might be used by the father or the son, rather than the mother or the daughter. So, women preferred to stay away from using technology due to the 'fear of unwanted'. The fear of unwanted could be defined as the fear of rebuke from family members if something went wrong with the technology while using it; or the fear of feeling guilty oneself if something unfortunate happened to the technology while using it. According to the GSMA's Report on Accelerating Affordable Smartphone Ownership in Emerging Markets of 2017, 134 million people in India cannot afford the cheapest available internet-enabled handset (GSMA, 2017). Among them, women, rural citizens and those belonging to lower income groups, have less access to ICTs particularly the internet (LIRNEAsia, 2018). Income status directly affected ICT use because of costs associated with hardware, software, service, maintenance, and training (Mossberger et al., 2012). According to the knowledge-gap hypothesis (Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1970), innovations in ICT tend to result in widening information inequalities. Parayil (2005) argued that because skills in the information society are more expensive to acquire than skills for older types of technologies, there is a risk that the gap may widen (Parayil, 2005). Although the gap is not necessarily the result of socio-economic factors, there is usually an association, as noted by Kumar and Best (2006) in their findings about SARI kiosks, used mainly by those with higher socio-economic status (Kumar and Best, 2006). Demographic and socioeconomic variables such as age, gender, education, and income have consistently been shown

to affect which internet applications are used and in what ways (Brandtzaeg, Heim, Karahasanovic, 2011).

Last but not the least, the study also revealed grassroots women's apprehensions towards youth members extensively using smartphones and internet. Many women functionaries were skeptical regarding too much usage of smartphones and internet by the new generation, pointing out that over usage of smartphone and internet have detached the young boys and girls from family, social life and responsibilities. Many remarked that spending large amount of time using digital media has crowded out enough time from the young ones to engage in other activities, such as interacting with family/friends face to face, reading, going out or doing social service. This discernment regarding ICTs is primarily because many young people are often seen spending much of their time chatting with virtual friends, playing online-games, watching music videos, web-series, sports, movies and using social media applications like Instagram and Tik Tok on their smartphones. Such contentions at the grassroots can probably be addressed by creating a larger cognizance among community members, particularly the youth members positioning ICTs as powerful tools for building capabilities and not just for entertainment. The government and local NGOs can play a role in this regard. One extreme view regarding digital technologies is that the increasing use of ICTs can lead to men and localities become 'globally connected but locally disconnected, physically and socially' (Castells, 1996).

6.3. The Way Forward

On the whole, the study demonstrated how ineffectually and gender neutrally the definition of 'digital empowerment' has been articulated in the country's policy considering the fact that there exists a larger issue of 'gender digital divide' wherein men have greater access and opportunities in digital technology and often use it more than the women in society.

Desk appraisal of different initiatives and strategies under the Digital India programme facilitate an understanding of the lacuna in terms of gender responsive efforts within the overall ICT framework of the country. There is no room for doubt that such efforts are inappropriately gender oriented and not enough to realize the

vision of women's digital empowerment in the country. In absence of a women-friendly and women-focused ICT policy in the country, efforts by the Government to realize the Digital India vision is more likely to remain unachieved. If noteworthy and substantial results are to be achieved, essentially the way forward lies in channelizing these efforts with an engendered approach and scaling them up to reach out to a wider constituency of women, particularly at the grassroots. In this context, the civil society with its wide local reach and influence could be an important actor, in demonstrating the potential of, and thereby ushering in a new digital revolution for women, particularly at the grassroots.

Assam is facing a number of challenges with respect to policy formulation, its usage, and awareness and understanding of ICT among the masses, which hampers the growth and further proliferation of ICT within the state (Deka, 2014). In this regard, the Government can play an important role in awareness creation of community members through strategic workshops or trainings in ICTs. But it is important to remember that awareness is not a binary issue, as it refers not only to knowledge that a service exists, but also to levels of awareness about its functions and applications as well as critical awareness of the extent to which it is relevant to a person's life priorities and concerns. The Digital India programme does not budget sufficient funds and expertise for marketing and awareness-raising at the grassroots. Therefore, with reference to the state of Assam, there is an urgent need for focused and systematic awareness and training programmes which could facilitate the process of making community members, especially the women members, digitally empowered.

In order to address ICT-related gender bias, it is imperative that gender is considered early in the process of the introduction of ICT in developing countries 'so that gender concerns can be incorporated from the beginning and not as a corrective measure afterwards' (Rana, 2001).The government needs to be awakened to its responsibility towards women's digital empowerment, and its policies amended accordingly, to create more space for inclusion of women, and accommodate their voices in ICT policy design, implementation and evaluation. Through firmer and unambiguous policy articulations; and more stringent implementations of gender sensitive norms, the government can actually turn out to be a prime player in ensuring digital

empowerment for women citizens, particularly at the grassroots of the country. If grassroots women are to engage in digital technologies and envisage ICTs as a tool for creating livelihood opportunities not only for themselves but also for different other sections in the community, it is largely important to undertake necessary steps to make women aware of their rights and empower them to accrue benefits out of ICTs. An important move in this direction could be the inclusion of women's rights including women's right to ICTs into the school curriculum from an early stage. This could be done by including women's rights into curriculum by locating it within the gender equality frameworks articulated by UDHR and CEDAW. At the same time it is crucial to take appropriate measures to educate grassroots actors including teachers, health personnel, lawyers, police, social workers, and sensitize the population regarding women's freedom to communicate and express over all forms of media (including ICTs).

6.4. Scope for Future Research

The understandings gained from the current study involving the situation analysis of ICT policy from a gender lens and case study of three districts in Assam threw up a number of other questions, answers to which could not be sought within the scope of the present study and may be seen as areas for undertaking future research.

The current study positions ICTs as having immense prospect in information dissemination and knowledge exchange among women. However, there remains a scope to systematically explore the positive and negative implications of these technologies.

Again, relying solely on qualitative methodology may not be sufficient to investigate complex issues such as gender digital divide. Therefore, qualitative research has to be supplemented with quantitative analysis to dig deeper into the multifaceted junctures between cultural, political, economic and social variables determining gendered digital divides.

The analysis of ICT policy framework in India served to throw light on how much of gender equality perspective has been included in policy. To a great extent it helped to understand the degree of seriousness with which policy initiatives and strategies are being implemented at the grassroots level. Such an assessment, however, is not

sufficient to estimate whether and to what extent the ICT policy has been effective or successful in bringing about positive results in the entire country with regards to women.

Again, the study is confined to understand the perspectives and contexts of grassroots women from rural areas only. However, a holistic understanding of gender digital divide needs to encompass the perspectives of women from all socio-economic and cultural contexts. Hence, there is a scope for carrying out such a research inclusive of women from the urban areas.

Moreover, comparative study of the Digital India programme in different northeast as well as other states of India would be an interesting and enlightening research area, particularly when undertaken against the backdrop of the status of women in those states. In this context, broad research could be carried out particularly to evaluate the extent to which the Digital North East Vision 2022 has impacted the lives of grassroots women in north-eastern states of India.

Further studies are also required to explore and understand the privacy and security provisions of grassroots women within the cyber space particularly with reference to the Scheme for Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCWC) formulated in September, 2018 by the Ministry of Home Affairs to handle cybercrimes against women and children in the country.

In a nutshell, the current study clearly indicates that overall there is a lot of work to be done in the field of gender and ICTs. India is a country which is currently emphasizing a lot on the growth and proliferation of ICTs. The research findings of this study if at one point in time are considered and incorporated into the formulation and implementation of ICT policies, there is a strong possibility that brighter prospects and avenues would inevitably open up for grassroots women in Assam. Again, in this regard, more research will certainly qualify a clearer understanding of the situation and hence inform the country's policy better. In days to come, there is hope to witness a better and brighter 'Digital India'- an India where all women are empowered and the differences in use and access to technology are bridged.

Table 2.1.: Profile of Case Districts from Assam

District	Population			Percentage of Tribal	Largest Tribe	Major Religion	Literacy Rate			Sex Ratio	GDI Rank according to AHDR	Reason for Selection of Case District
	Male	Female	Total				Male	Female	Total			
JORHAT	556,805	535,451	1,092,256	12.8	Mishing	Hinduism	87.63	76.45	82.15	962	6	Literacy rate is high; ranks high in gender development; multiple operational ICT interventions
MAJULI	85,5886	81,738	167,304	46.38	Mishing	Hinduism	74.76	61.34	78.56	955	*Not Available	New district; geographically isolated; envisioned to be the first Wi-Fi district in Assam
BAKSA	481,330	468,745	950,075	34.84	Bodo	Hinduism	77.03	61.27	69.25	974	20	Different administrative set-up under autonomous council; ranks low in gender equality; less political participation by women

Source: Census of India 2011 and Assam Human Development Report AHRD 2014

* AHDR was published before Majuli was declared a district