

Standing Committee Report Summary

Review of Schemes/Projects under Digital Bharat Nidhi

- The Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology (Chair: Dr Nishikant Dubey) presented its report on the 'Review of the Performance of Schemes/Projects under Digital Bharat Nidhi implemented by Public and Private sector' on August 6, 2026. The Universal Service Obligation Fund was established in 2002 to provide financial support for telecom services in rural and remote areas. It was renamed as Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN) in 2024. DBN aims to support telecom services in all underserved areas. It also aims to support research and development (R&D) in telecommunication technologies. Key DBN-funded schemes include BharatNet and 4G mobile projects in border and remote areas. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Limited progress and utilisation under BharatNet:** The BharatNet programme aims to provide broadband connectivity to all gram panchayats (GPs) and villages across the country. The Committee noted that, as of February 2026, only 30% of GPs had a functional BharatNet connection. Among these GPs, 77% had broadband connections for usage. The Committee noted issues such as delays in tender finalisation, disputes with implementation agencies, capacity constraints of such agencies, and delay in obtaining land clearances. It recommended: (i) state-wise performance audit, (ii) enhancing utilisation through increasing household connections and leasing unused network capacity, and (iii) timely tendering and contract finalisation.
 - **Challenges in connectivity projects in security-sensitive areas:** The Committee noted that about 93% of the 4G mobile towers planned in Left Wing Extremism affected areas and 42% of those in border outposts, had been commissioned (as of February 2026). It noted challenges in commissioning towers such as difficult terrain, security constraints, delays in forest clearances, and logistical limitations. It recommended providing logistical and security support to implementing agencies, and establishing a coordination mechanism between ministries and agencies to fast-track clearances.
 - **Limited coverage and service quality in projects for remote and uncovered areas:** DBN-funded 4G saturation project and Aspirational Districts scheme aims to extend 4G connectivity to uncovered villages. The Committee noted that, as of February 2026, about 61% of planned towers have been commissioned under the 4G saturation project. About 81% of planned towers have been commissioned under Aspirational Districts scheme. Further, the Committee noted that third-party audits of mobile connectivity projects identified issues such as coverage gaps, weak signal strength, and duplicate infrastructure. The Committee recommended strengthening the field-level implementation and action on audit findings.
 - **Challenges in telecom infrastructure deployment in north-eastern areas:** The Committee noted that 68% of the planned (2G) mobile towers had been installed under the Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for North Eastern Region (as of February 2026). It noted certain challenges such as difficult terrain, insurgency issues, poor service quality, and frequent road expansion requiring shifting of optical fibre cables (OFC). The Committee recommended: (i) sharing of infrastructure among telecom operators in difficult terrains, and (ii) outcome-based framework with defined service quality benchmarks to evaluate network quality in these areas.
 - **Role of PSUs:** The Committee observed that most DBN-funded schemes have engaged PSUs such as BSNL and ITI in roles related to project management and implementation. It noted the performance and execution of PSUs vary across schemes. It recommended strengthening pre-project appraisal and contractual obligations, and introducing performance linked incentives for engaged PSUs. The Committee also noted the role of Power Grid Corporation of India in expanding telecom services through its subsidiary PowerTel and support to BharatNet through laying OFC. It recommended greater integration of telecom and power infrastructure.
 - **Translating R&D into deployable technologies:** The Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) Scheme under DBN aims to promote R&D in communication technologies. The Committee noted the need to translate funded research into deployable solutions in rural and remote areas. It recommended prioritising the development of field-ready technologies, expanding pilot deployments in rural areas, and facilitating stronger linkages between TTDF-funded innovations and BharatNet.

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