

New telecom policy lacks ambition, inclusiveness

NTP 2025 focuses more on expanding 4G/5G mobile networks than fixed, fibre, WiFi or other technologies

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India's telecom policies, from NTP 1994 through NTP 1999 to NDCP (National Digital Communications Policy) 2018, have historically served as a mirror to the nation's growing telecom and digital aspirations.

The NDCP 2018 was the first to make a bold and ambitious blueprint for plain old telecom's vital linkages with digital and also one that placed the citizen at the centre of a transformative vision — universal broadband, inclusive growth, and global leadership in emerging technologies.

Fast forward to 2025, and we are starting at a disquieting backward shift in tone and ambition. The draft National Telecom Policy (NTP) 2025 — currently under discussion — seems to have forsaken the synergistic connection with digital and appears to have lost the spirit that made NDCP 2018 so path-breaking.

DILUTED VISION

The most glaring dilution lies in the policy vision statement itself. NDCP 2018 declared its intent “to unlock the transformative power of digital communications networks — to achieve the goal of digital empowerment and

improve well being of the people of India...”, whereas the draft NTP 2025 merely makes the bland offer of transforming “India as a telecom product nation”.

Of course, it goes on to state “that is driven by innovation and that universally connects its citizens meaningfully, securely, and sustainably” and that it would “build upon... NDCP 2018” but the strategies and goals outlined do not appear to support this claim.

NDCP 2018's strengths were its concrete, time-bound praiseworthy targets: to achieve by 2022, universal broadband access at 50 Mbps, 10 Gbps connectivity for all Gram Panchayats, and the creation of four million jobs and many other specific goals. These were bold, measurable, and offered a roadmap to accountability. Yes, we have failed to achieve some of them but, where has accountability gone? Are the mission and the targets to be downgraded?

The draft NTP 2025 offers no numerical commitment to rural broadband, no mention of affordability, and no plan to bridge the digital divide. The omission does not seem accidental — it signals a worrying execution fatigue.

Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia declared on June 24



TELECOM POLICY. Need for review

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that WiFi is the ‘invisible power creating visible change’ and that “WiFi should stand for Widespread Inclusion for Future India”. In contrast, Draft NTP slashes Public WiFi Hotspots (PWH) goal to one million by 2030 from 10 million in 2022 (NDCP 2018) and 50 million in 2030 (Prime Minister's 6G Vision). How can true inclusivity and universal connectivity happen?

Again, from the goal of 50 per cent households to have fixed broadband by 2022, draft NTP'25 seeks fixed broadband in only 10 crore households (less than 30 per cent) and, that too only by 2030!

NDCP 2018 had a clear thrust on marginalised communities, women and

persons with disabilities. All these people have lost out in draft NTP 2025. On affordability, there is mention of ensuring that telecom/broadband services cost at less than 2 per cent of monthly Gross National Income per capita, overlooking the large disparity between rural and urban incomes.

FIBRE GOALS

Adequate fibre is an accepted top priority for any advanced digital economy. India lags heavily on this front. Rightly therefore, NDCP stressed a Fibre First Initiative and the goal of laying 50 lakh OFC by 2022. Sadly however, there is no mention of this crucial aspect in draft NTP 2025.

The draft NTP 2025 treats telecom as an end in itself, rather than as a catalyst for national transformation. Moreover, it seems to focus only on expanding 4G/5G mobile networks, not fixed or fiber or WiFi or other technologies.

India's telecom sector doesn't need regulatory housekeeping masquerading as policy. The government must take this opportunity to review its draft NTP 2025 and reclaim the spirit of NDCP 2018 — with proper accountability and corrective steps.

The writer is President of Broadband India Forum. Views expressed are personal