

CYBERSECURITY REACHING THE UNREACHED

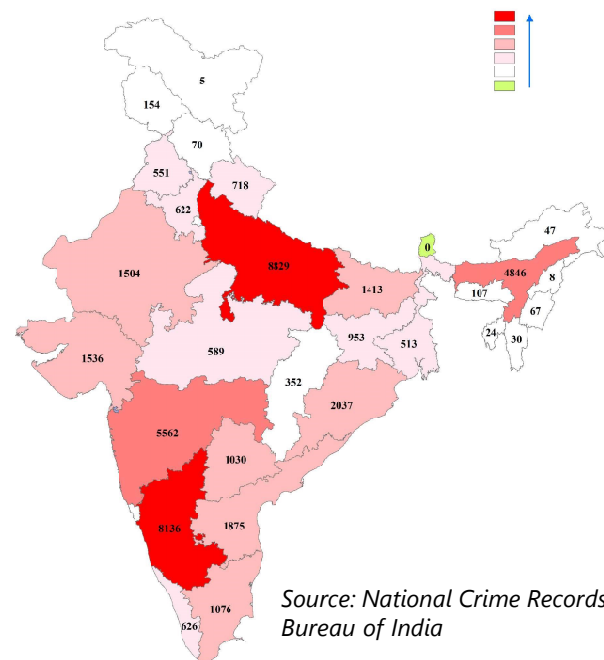
Creating awareness among women consumers and entrepreneurs on cyber security; and helping them become more vigilant and cyber resilient

Introduction

With growing digitalisation, more and more businesses are gradually shifting to digital platforms. In India, the digital economy is expected to contribute up to 20 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) by 2024. There has been a concomitant rise in cybercrimes. Cyberattacks through Malware, Phishing, Ransomware, etc. have become commonplace.

As per the data available from the National Crime Records Bureau of India, a total of 52,974 Cybercrimes were registered in 2021, showing an increase of 5.9 per cent over 2020 (50,035 cases). During 2021, 60.8 per cent of cyber-crime cases registered had the motive of fraud (32,230 out of 52,974 cases) followed by sexual exploitation (8.6 per cent, 4,555 cases) and extortion (5.4 per cent, 2,883 cases).

Cyber Crimes in India in 2021

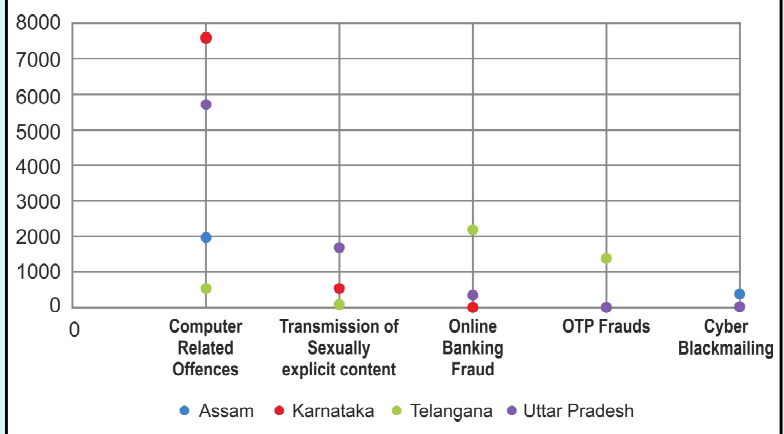


Key Challenges

Knowledge and awareness among citizens (particularly girls in the age group of 18-22 years) on how to identify a cyberattack, how to counter cyberattacks, and what needs to be done in case of a cyberattack, remains limited, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

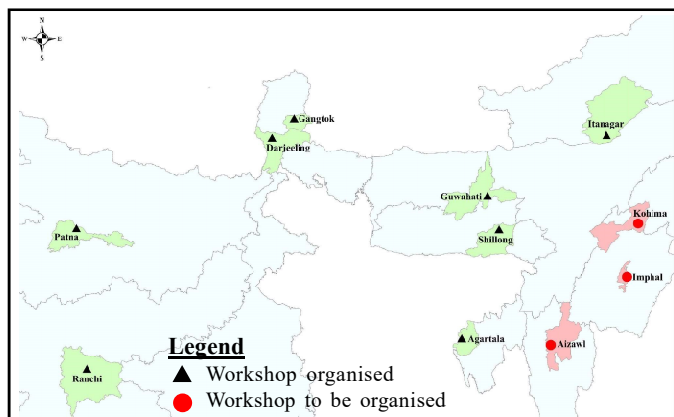
Additionally, Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) are lacking resources for investing in cyber safety infrastructure. Hence, they remain vulnerable to cyberattacks, especially phishing attacks where MSMEs are used as a backdoor to get access to the mainframe of bigger industries.

Major Cyber Frauds in Selected States of India



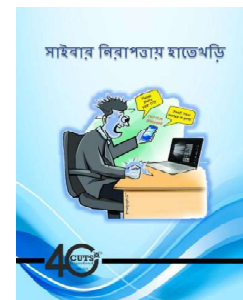
CUTS Approach

In this context, CUTS International has been working on developing capacities of adult girls (in the age group of 18-22 years), and MSMEs, particularly women-led MSMEs, on various aspects of cyber security in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas in East and Northeast India.



- CUTS, with the support from the U.S. Consulate, Kolkata and in collaboration with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) India, organised a series of capacity-building programmes under a project titled “Cyber Safe East India”. The workshops were aimed at educating and raising awareness among MSMEs and women entrepreneurs on cyber security and ways to combat cyber threats. They were organised at Tier-II cities in East and Northeast India. They demystified the various ways in which a consumer could face cyber breaches, how they could prevent these breaches from happening, and what they should do in the event of a cyber breach. These aspects were elaborated using simple examples and in non-technical terms.
- CUTS is conducting a series of training workshops in West Bengal, at the district level under the project entitled ‘Capacity Building of Women on Cyber Security in Select Districts of West Bengal’ in six selected districts of West Bengal, namely - Purulia, Jhargram, Howrah, Siliguri, South 24 Parganas, and North 24 Parganas. **The majority of the participants (girls in the age group of 18-22 years, and housewives) at the workshops mentioned that it was the first time that they came to know about the Do’s and Don’ts of cyber security.** After the workshops, they requested CUTS to organise more of them in their localities.

- CUTS developed a ‘Cyber Security Quick Guide Handbook’ in Bengali to demystify the concept of cyber security among the grassroots stakeholders.



Outcomes

- To date, CUTS has sensitised more than 500 small and micro enterprises and their associations and 250 adult women from different states in East and Northeast India to record and register their challenges on cyber security and subsequently provide possible solutions. **Currently, a total of eight states are covered, viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, and West Bengal.**
- Awareness was raised and capacity was built through workshops, on how to secure their portals by conducting periodical audits, and how to ensure the safety of the critical infrastructure in their businesses.

Policy Recommendations

As a global public policy think-and action-tank, CUTS has been actively engaged in advocating policy recommendations surrounding key global issues, including cybersecurity. In the project, ‘Ethical 6G: Identifying Elements of Ethical Framework for 6G and Creating Opportunities for India and Australia,’ CUTS and its partners recognised the need for a comprehensive national cybersecurity policy that prioritises threat assessment and response, attuned to new and emerging technologies.

This policy should encompass mechanisms for tracking cybercrime, bolstering cyber forensic capabilities, and facilitating continuous information sharing between the public and private sectors, including MSMEs. The strategy should also foster cybersecurity growth for MSMEs, by promoting development and scaling up initiatives. Emphasis should be placed on human and institutional capacity building through skill development initiatives, awareness campaigns, and hackathons.

Food for Thought

CUTS intends to uphold the spirit of “Cyber Swachhta” (safe cyberspace) and generate more and more awareness among consumers and businesses across India on how to become cyber resilient and avoid cyberattacks by following simple steps in everyday life:

- Reaching out to more consumers, and businesses in semi-urban and rural locations in India;
- Customising content, creating local language user-friendly handbooks, highlighting the dos and don'ts of cyber security;

- Popularise various grievance redressal mechanisms related to cyber breaches for consumers;
- Undertaking innovative workshops involving cyber security scenarios;
- Identifying and recognising cyber security messengers among citizens who could further disseminate the learnings;
- Creating sector-specific strategies for upholding cyber security and reducing fraud
- Providing inputs for the formulation of policy/norms on cybersecurity at national and international levels.

Participants' Feedback

Richa Kumari, an Independent Entrepreneur and Founder of The Kedar House from Patna, Bihar

has stopped sharing OTP on phone calls and accepting friend requests on social media from unknown people, installing applications only from Play Store, and started using True Caller for identifying spam calls. Now, she is also very reluctant to use Public Wi-Fi unless necessary.

Usha Lama, Executive Member of the Sikkim Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Cell (SEED Cell) from Gangtok, Sikkim

underscores the eye-opening experience gained through their recent engagement with cyber security awareness. She strongly advocates for the replication of similar workshops in every district, and believes that the next generation requires substantial knowledge about the scams that permeate the digital landscape.

Kritika Pradhan, General Secretary of Gorkha Women Welfare Forum from Darjeeling, West Bengal emphasises the crucial significance of workshops like these for women entrepreneurs. Through her active participation in one such workshop, she gained valuable insights into the nuances of digital marketing, learning not only about its advantages but also understanding the potential pitfalls. She sees such workshops as catalysts for personal and professional growth, fostering a secure and informed entrepreneurial community.

Pratibha Raj, Founder and CEO of CURIOUS BEE (Prativa Enterprises) from Patna, Bihar

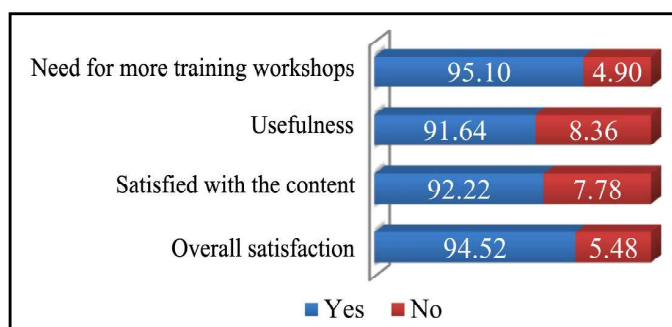
is now very careful about storing the contact details of her clients and customers and always keeps a backup on the system that is not connected to the internet. She has also told her family members and friends not to click on any unwanted links from an unknown sender through email IDs or messages.

Anushree Barman, Founder of Nandika Food Products from Guwahati, Assam

shared that through the training workshop, she learned two important things – *firstly*, how to protect personal information from being leaked online; and *secondly*, how to verify fake emails from unknown sources. Presently, she has removed all unwanted third-party applications from her laptop and mobile phone and stopped sharing OTPs over phone calls.

Anand Tamang, Owner of the Fair View Homestay from Darjeeling, West Bengal

expressed that the training workshop helped him a lot to safeguard his business from cyber-attacks. He said that based on the learning from the workshop, he has stopped sharing OTPs and cautious of sharing any personal information through email, social media, or, over phone calls; takes precautions while using online platforms; blocks unknown suspicious callers, and also educate others on cyber fraud and security.





Cyber Safe East India – Workshops on Cyber Security for E-Businesses

- **Phase-I:** <https://cuts-crc.org/cyber-safe-east-india-workshops-on-cyber-security-for-msmes/>
- **Phase-II:** <https://cuts-crc.org/cyber-safe-east-india-workshops-on-cyber-security-for-msmes-and-women-entrepreneurs-phase-ii/>
- **Phase-III:** <https://cuts-crc.org/cyber-safe-east-india-workshops-on-cyber-security-for-msmes-and-women-entrepreneurs-phase-iii/>



CUTS International

D-217, Bhaskar Marg, Bani Park, Jaipur 302 016, India

Ph: 91.141.2282821, Fax: 91.141.2282485, Email: cuts@cuts.org, Website: www.cuts-international.org

Also at Delhi, Calcutta and Chittorgarh (India); Lusaka (Zambia); Nairobi (Kenya); Accra (Ghana); Hanoi (Vietnam); Geneva (Switzerland); and Washington DC (USA).