EQualitY Centre for
inclusive innovation

The sweeping tide of digital revolution has lifted many to unprecedented heights-but not all, and not to the same extent. No doubt, significant progress has been made in terms of expansion of the quantity of digital services. However, there is no automatic link between digital expansion and digital inclusion. That linkage has to be established through policies and institutions.

For example, the existing measure of internet access-online versus offline-greatly overestimates how many people across the globe are digitally included. The Covid-19 pandemic has underscored the realization that basic internet access is simply not enough. While nearly 70% of people worldwide are now considered to be online, billions still lack the quality of access required to do essential activities online like access healthcare, take a class, look for a job, or participate in the digital economy.

Unfortunately, quality connectivity and thus quality digital services, are still only enjoyed by society's elites and the poor and marginalized remain excluded, left behind by the digital revolution and deepening existing inequalities.

ACHIEVING ZERO DIGITAL DIVIDE

'e-Quality' is the input to achieve the objective of digital inclusion or digital equality, which contributes towards achieving the ultimate goal of overall equitable development.

The 'e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation' is a global institution for promoting and committing to eliminate the digital divide and promote digital inclusion worldwide by promoting South-South and North-South technology transfer, funding initiatives, and policy research.

MAJOR FOCUS AREAS

1. South-South Technology Transfer

The centre will leverage Bangladesh's remarkable progress in frugal but inclusive digital transformation to transfer proven digital solutions to underserved communities in developing nations and LDCs. The centre's experience and success can pave the way for expanding to more countries, promoting inclusivity on a global scale.

2. International ICT Innovation (i3) Matching Fund Facility

Bangladesh's proposed i3 matching fund facility aims to support LDCs in piloting digital solutions customized to their unique realities. By fostering innovation and technology sharing, the centre can empower nations to bridge the digital divide and accelerate inclusive digital transformation.

3. Digital Divide Research

Ensuring digital inclusion, although necessary, is not sufficient. Social exclusion in the e-society occurs at multiple dimensions and results from types of capability failure other than the mere deprivation of technological usage. Drawing from the concept proposed by Sen(2000), Heeks(2022) introduced a new perspective linking social inequality in the digital context to 'unfavourable inclusion', which he refers to as 'adverse digital incorporation'. The main idea of 'adverse digital incorporation' is that inclusion in a digital system may enable a more privileged group to extract disproportionate value from the resources of another, less-advantaged group. These realities provide context for eQuality research that focuses on the necesity to look at both analytically and practically, at the critical importance of equitable access to digital development as a major determining factor for ensuring equitable development. Conducting research on standards, the e-Quality index and strategies to address pressing digital divide issues is crucial. Policy and research initiatives by the center will accurately identify digital divide issues and advocate for data-driven interventions to promote inclusivity.

Launching at the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly

Esteemed dignitaries at this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF 2023) on Sustainable Development praised Bangladesh's achievements in its frugal, citizen-centric journey of digital transformation. The concept of the e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation was also highly appreciated for its vision of championing global cooperation and innovative policy approaches to leave no one behind.

The proposed launch of the center at UNGA 78 by Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other heads of states signifies a momentous step towards achieving this vision.

Quotes from Dignitaries at HLPF 2023

Mr. H. E. Naguib Sinarimbo

Minister, Ministry of Interior and Local Government, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Republic of Philippines

"We therefore feel that the e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation, with a vision to ensure Zero Digital Divide, is just the medium we need right now, to ensure that inclusive digital transformation is being practiced. Not just in our region, but across the world. The greater transfer of knowledge, expertise and technology, piloting fund support and effective research and policy guidance is absolutely crucial at this moment. In this world, the centre can be a game changer for countries in the Global South, such as our country and our region."

Mr. Masud Bin Momen
Senior Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

"e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation aims to ensure Zero Digital Divide for the world. It will open up avenues for excellent chemistry and collaboration of international partners and communities. Such collaboration will support and enrich countries to enable improved quality of life for its citizens. Leveraging this e-Quality Centre, they can strengthen our South-South Cooperation and also the triangular cooperation efforts to support a large number of countries around the world. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs always welcomes such efforts that nourish and promote innovation and inclusivity."

Mr. Mohammed Shamsul Arefin
**Secretary, ICT Division
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

"As more countries are reaching out to Bangladesh for support and guidance, we are in the process of establishing the e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation with a vision to ensure Zero Digital Divide for the world. The major focus areas of the e-Quality Centre are: digital solutions proven to transform underserved communities, international ICT innovation, matching funds from Bangladesh to support LDCs, to support digital divide research, standardized e-Quality Index strategies for addressing the most pressing digital divide issues."

Mr. Haoliang Xu

Under-Secretary-General and Associate Administrator of UNDP

"a2i initiative, which started as the 'Access to Information project'. It has not become the 'Aspire to Innovate (a2i)'. And through this, a 15 year journey, we went together under the leadership of the Government of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has established a network of 9000 digital service stations, providing digitalize the services for 2000 types of services that anyone can access within walking distance either by phone, by cell phone, by normal analog phones, or on website. As a result of this, it'll reduce the ordinary people's need to travel to get services, reduce the cost of transportation and has generated a saving of $22 billion since its inception, reduce 19 billion workdays and 13 billion visits."

H.E. Ambassador Mr. Mohan Pieris,

Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York & President of the 21st Session of the UN High Level Committee on South-South Cooperation

"The yawning digital divide and the need to ensure digital inclusion and connectivity in particular in countries of the global south. Following on from this collaboration on the proposed establishment of an e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation, with its ambitious vision to ensure Zero Digital Divide for the world, it's definitely a fantastic dream."

H.E. Mr. Muhammad Abdul Muhith

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

"Implementation of the SDGs remains our overarching goal, and we all know that South-South and Triangular Cooperation can strongly accelerate the achievement of sustainable development. One of the objectives of the event is also to highlight how South-South Cooperation can be leveraged to reduce the digital divide through an e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation, that unique model of digital inclusivity developed by Bangladesh."

Ms. Dima Al-Khatib

Director, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

"By enhancing knowledge sharing and collaboration and by opening new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurial activities, digital technology is becoming a key driver for growth and development in the global south and can further bolster South-South Cooperation and contribute to the closing of this digital divide."

Mr. Anil Kayalar

First Counsellor, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Republic of Turkiye

"We can learn from ourselves and from our counterparts. It's a two way street development of new cooperation mechanisms, zero digital gap, access to government services, technology, financing capacity needed "

Mr. Camilo Tellez-Merchan
Deputy Managing Director, Better Than Cash Alliance
United Nations Capital Development Fund

"Rapid digitalization has helped Bangladesh leapfrog traditional barriers to development by reconfiguring its services and achieve record growth, it has facilitated South-South Cooperation and can do the same for other economies in Latin America, in Asia and in Africa. One of the big roles that e-Quality can actually play is to convey the importance of responsible digitization. The country has taken a lead in sharing the lessons in these spaces and it's important that we prioritize the data safeguarded, privacy safeguarded and that women are prioritized. It is evident that within our grasp lies an immense opportunity for governments to join forces and leverage each other's lessons to drive the sustainable development agenda drawing up on our collective strength and expertise."

Ms. Vyjayanti T Desai
Practice Manager
ID4D and G2Px, The World Bank

"I think those countries that have had in place digital public infrastructure, whether it was ID registries, data sharing, really saw a higher ability to respond more quickly and with higher coverage. Just connectivity alone is insufficient to bridge the gap. We need to address issues of digital literacy or affordable devices. We've been committed as a long standing partner to Bangladesh's digital transformation from the LICT project to the current end project, and we're going to be providing support going forward around digital public infrastructure and last mile connectivity."

Dr. Selim Jahan
Former Director
Human Development Report Office (HDRO),UNDP
Lead Author of Global Human Development Report (HDR)

"We can talk about digital inclusion, but they cannot be achieved unless we have digital rights. The whole notion of digital rights can be viewed from five perspectives or in other words, five W's. Digital rights for WHAT; Digital rights for Whom; Digital Rights in WHAT areas; HOW can we ensure digital rights; WHEN we can ensure digital rights. Unless we can establish the digital rights of everybody, then all these digital transformations are going to create new inequalities and are going to accelerate inequality in society. Countries where digital rights are moving on, they're at different speeds and at different paces. So, therefore, the sounds of collaboration can also be a platform where there can be a kind of a united approach. There can be standardization of definition, standardization of services. Because in that way, we will have a more coordinated and coherent approach to digital rights"

Mr. Anir Chowdhury
Policy Advisor, a2i Programme
Government of Bangladesh & UNDP Bangladesh

"We must start with some very specific marginalized populations if we want to reduce the digital divide women, and third gender; persons with disabilities; the extreme poor; and the cottage, micro small and medium enterprises. To reduce the digital divide, we must consider: how we are designing services, whether we're designing for the poor, whether we're designing for the women, whether we're designing for the CMSMEs; whether we're designing for the persons with disabilities. So in the three areas of the centre understand, solve and fund, we're hoping that the digital divide research that started from Bangladesh, with the leadership of Dr. Selim Jahan, and several other academicians from around the world, will continue with other countries and move forward with the e-Quality index"

Ministry of
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