80th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Side-event on

Smart Innovation for Sustainable Development: Perspective from Bangladesh and the Region

Date: 22nd April, 2024
Time: 13.15-14.15 hours (Bangkok time)
Venue: CR-4, Level 1, UN Conference Center, Bangkok, Thailand
Format: Hybrid

Meeting joining Link: https://zoom.us/j/7100855800
Meeting ID: 710 085 5800

Organized by:

ICT Division, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bangkok

Background

Over more than past decade, Bangladesh has emerged as an iconic country in the Asia-Pacific that overcame massive challenges to insert the mental and physical presence of digital intervention in everyday lives. Embedding thought-provoking mindset and positive disruption to the way of doing things, Bangladesh has been a trailblazer of digital innovation in the global South by catalyzing methodical development of innovation capacity within policymakers, civil society, citizens and thus lessening digital divide within the society. In Bangladesh, service delivery innovations were designed to be citizen-centric and developed with a bottom-up approach. A number of ICT based solutions changed the way citizen perceive receiving Government services. Few of these are:

9,394 Digital Centres at the smallest rural administrative and local Government units have been facilitating the citizens with 387 public services at low cost and shorter time, which would earlier take citizens to travel miles and wait in long queues. Digital Centres turned out to be an effective example of Public-Private Partnerships promoting women entrepreneurs to lead the way. AI based voice-enabled platform "333 National Helpline" was introduced to open doors for access to information of public services, grievances, social issues like prevention of child marriages, health counseling etc. It also enabled citizens with low literacy and familiarity with technology to have equal access to information. myGov is a single, central platform that not only brings the digital services from all ministries onto one app/online platform, but also features all auxiliary services, such as online payments. Currently, 14,660 Government offices are integrated with myGov enabling more than 4 million users availing services regularly.

Such massive in-house ICT innovation and intervention encapsulated in reducing Time (T), Cost (C) and number of Visits (V) required of citizens for accessing Government services. From 2010 to 2023, 5.8 billion services have been disseminated that witnessed savings of 19 billion days, US$21.60 billion and 12.70 (unit?) visits by citizens to avail those services.

Being known due to Bangladesh's flagship innovative ICT solutions, more and more countries are reaching out to Bangladesh for scaling up novel solutions to public service challenges by customizing necessary tools and strategies to their unique context. To that effort, Bangladesh has already been providing knowledge, advisory and technology supports to Fiji, Philippines, South Sudan, Jordan, Turkey, Yemen, Somalia, etc. on e-governance, skills and e-Commerce to ensure access of the least advanced, vulnerable groups. Fulfilling the Digital Bangladesh vision 2021, Bangladesh is now

headed towards creating a Smart Bangladesh by 2041 massively leveraging its ICT infrastructure, connectivity and regional networks and reducing digital disparity to the minimum.

The essence of Smart Bangladesh lies in its inclusivity, focusing on personalized service delivery for citizens of Bangladesh. Anchored on four core principles—Smart Citizens, Smart Government, Smart Economy, and Smart Society—it aims to narrow the digital gap through creation and expansion of sustainable digital solutions, accessible to all citizens and businesses, irrespective of their socio-economic status or scale.

Smart Bangladesh promises inclusivity, with a commitment to reduce existing digital divide in the world and reaching the unreached with the benefits of digitization. In an effort to reinforce this commitment, Bangladesh has established "e-Quality Centre for Inclusive Innovation" with a vision to ensure a world with #ZeroDigitalDivide. The Centre is an ambition to eliminating digital divide and promoting digital inclusion worldwide by facilitating global technology transfer, policy research and financing. The major focus areas of the Centre are: Digital divide research (standards, e-Quality index & strategies for addressing the most pressing digital divide issues), South South knowledge and technology transfer from Bangladesh and other partner countries to transform the underserved communities and International ICT Innovation (i^3) matching fund facility from Bangladesh for supporting the LDCs to enable them to pilot digital solutions customized to their own reality, incentivizing them to take that first step towards digital innovation for sustainable development.

Objective

Against this backdrop, the side-event titled "**Smart Innovation for Sustainable Development: Perspective from Bangladesh and the Region**" is poised to shed lights on the transformative potential of digital innovation in advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within Bangladesh and the broader Asia-Pacific region. The side-event will present an opportunity for Government representatives, along with prominent policymakers, development practitioners, and dignitaries to exchange insights and expertise.

Expected Outcome

- Enhance collaborative efforts across the region to harness digital innovation for the swift execution of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Increased awareness among participants about the potential of digital innovation in advancing SDGs in Asia and the Pacific region
- Strengthened commitment from attendees to prioritize and invest in digital solutions for addressing key challenges related to the SDGs in the region
- Sharing of best practices, case studies, and lessons learned in implementing digital innovation initiatives for sustainable development, contributing to collective knowledge and learning
- Formation of partnerships and collaborations among participants to facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and joint initiatives aimed at harnessing digital innovation for SDGs in Asia and the Pacific
- Promote greater transfer of technology solutions to accelerate SDG achievement and reduce digital divide

Participants

The High-Level Side-event aims to engage a diverse range of participants who can contribute to the discussions and collaborations on extensively leveraging digital innovation for sustainable

developments across the globe. This event will draw participation of representatives from the United Nations ESCAP member states, Government officials and delegates from various countries, development agencies, representatives from international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector attending the 80th Session of the ESCAP. The diverse composition of the target audience ensures a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue among stakeholders, promoting knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the formation of partnerships among different sectors and actors involved in this cooperation.