United Nations General Assembly Side-event on
Envisioning a world with #ZeroDigitalDivide
through e-Quality Centre for Inclusive Innovation

Time: 25th September, 2023
Duration: 90 minutes
Time: 10am-11:30am (New York time)
Venue: Conference Room-8, UNHQ, New York
Mode: Hybrid

Organizer: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Supported by: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Observer Research Foundation, People Centered Internet

Background

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable advancements in the implementation of digitalization within the realm of public services. Over more than a decade and a half, this digital revolution has resulted in saving 19 billion workdays, 22 billion USD, and 13 billion visits that citizens would require to avail themselves of these public services. While there has been an expansion of digital public service delivery, has inclusion been ensured all the way through? The blessings of the digital revolution have not been uniformed for all segments of society and the expansion of digital services has not necessarily ensured digital inclusion; rather, to some extent, it has deepened the existing digital divide.

To make digital transformation work for the economically challenged and marginalized and submit to the commitment of #ZeroDigitalDivide around the world; research and policy intervention is a powerful component. Leveraging its achievements in digitization, Bangladesh has actively functioned as the Secretariat of South South Network for Public Service Innovation (SSN4PSI). Through these efforts, Bangladesh has been providing knowledge and technology transfer to other developing nations and LDCs, including; Fiji, Philippines, Somalia, Jordan, Yemen, Türkiye, and South Sudan.

As more countries are reaching out for partnerships on digital transformation and addressing the digital divide, the country is in the process of establishing an *e-Quality Centre for Inclusive Innovation* with a vision to ensure a world with #ZeroDigitalDivide. The 'e-Quality Centre for inclusive innovation' is an ambition to eliminating digital divide and promoting digital inclusion worldwide by facilitating global technology transfer, policy research and financing.

Focus Areas

The major focus areas of the centre are:

• Digital divide research (standards, e-Quality index, strategies for addressing the most pressing digital divide issues). Such research will help to bridge the gap between those with access to digital technologies and those without, ensuring equal opportunities and inclusive digital development for all.

• Technology transfer from Bangladesh and other partner countries of digital solutions proven to transform underserved communities. Such knowledge and technology transfer have proven effective in addressing the needs of LDCs and developing nations, empowering marginalized populations, and fostering inclusive development. Leveraging its experience, the centre can expand to more countries and regions.

- International ICT Innovation (i³) matching fund facility from Bangladesh to support LDCs. This matching fund facility will enable countries to pilot digital solutions customized to their own reality, hopefully incentivizing them to take that first step.

Objective

Against this backdrop, the **e-Quality Centre for Inclusive Innovation** is being launched at a high-level event at the UNGA 2023. The launch will present an opportunity for Government representatives, along with prominent policymakers, development practitioners, and dignitaries to exchange insights and expertise concerning:

i. What are the design issues and policy elements that have caused digital exclusion?
ii. What remedial approaches can be formulated and implemented to reverse the trend and achieve #ZeroDigitalDivide?
iii. Is it possible to create a global e-Quality index? How can countries work together to achieve this?
iv. How can countries on a similar development trajectory work together to support each other to achieve #ZeroDigitalDivide in their respective context, considering differences in access to connectivity, digital skills, devices, power and information asymmetry inherent in society, among other factors.?
v. What role could the International ICT Innovation (i3) facility committed by the Government of Bangladesh play to combat the digital divide challenges in countries around the world?
vi. How could other countries, international organizations, intergovernmental agencies, NGOs, business and corporates enterprises, academics and media interested in joining efforts with platforms launched from Bangladesh be associated?
vii. How could a common platform for epistemological discourse and synthesis emerge from the efforts under the #ZeroDigitalDivide campaign?

e-Quality Centre: First Look at Network Leveraging

During the side-event at the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development 2023, organized by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN and a2i, the concept of the centre was presented. International experts including Ministers, Permanent Representatives to the UN and high-level officials from the World Bank, UN, and other development organizations discussed the potential of cooperation among countries around the world as the most efficient means to address the digital divide and promote global inclusivity. The dignitaries focused on Bangladesh's digital transformation journey leveraging frugal approaches, Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and citizen-centric innovation and appreciated the idea of the proposed e-Quality Centre.

The second breakfast meeting held at the State Guest House Padma in Dhaka highlighted on the possibilities of complementarities in competencies, skills and adjacencies for augmenting accrued intellectual capital from the many exercises carried out in the past fifteen years to find solutions for the global communities. Ambassadors, High Commissioners, Consuls General and other senior officials present in the meeting agreed to work on the idea further.

A consensus was reached to further investigate and build on the visionary commitments of the e-Quality Centre to promote international collaboration and inventive policy strategies that ensure No One is Left Behind.