

Digital Bangladesh Strategy in Action

Introduction

While Awami League's Charter for Change announced the concept of Digital Bangladesh as an integral component of Vision 2021, the budget 2009-10 speech of the Honourable Finance Minister elaborated on the concept as one of socio-economic transformation enabled by information and communication technologies. He in no uncertain terms debunked the myth that Digital Bangladesh is an 'ICT Vision'. Indeed, the revised National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR) Phase II in all five of its strategies marries the elements of Digital Bangladesh quite effectively. The 6th Five Year Plan places an equal importance to Digital Bangladesh as part of the nation's development strategy.

The ICT Policy 2009, ICT Act 2009, Right to Information Act 2009, various local government acts promulgated in 2009 laid the foundation for identifying the Digital Bangladesh priorities for the government. As such, a strategy document 'Setting Digital Bangladesh Priorities' is being drafted to integrate the goals of Digital Bangladesh with those of key development sectors to harmonize top-level priority setting through a participatory and inclusive approach. The document will identify the Digital Bangladesh priorities along three broad categories:

- 1) Pillars of Digital Bangladesh
- 2) Vital Developmental Sectors
- 3) Enabling Environment

This document will be available for stakeholder consultation in early March, 2010.

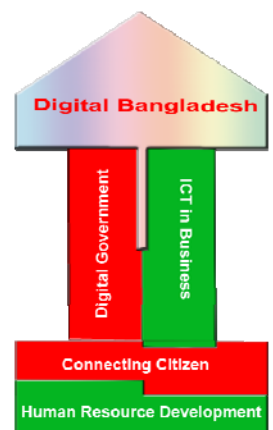
Pillars of Digital Bangladesh

In her speech on October 31, 2009, while inaugurating the Digital Bangladesh workshop for the UNOs, the Honourable Prime Minister clearly outlined the four pillars of Digital Bangladesh vision: developing human resources ready for the 21st century, connecting citizens in ways most meaningful to them, taking services to citizens' doorsteps and making the private sector and market more productive and competitive through the use of ICTs.

For each of the pillars, the strategy will (i) analyze the current overall situation with specific references to relevant initiatives taken so far; (ii) identify the key success factors behind its progress; (iii) specify the key challenges and untapped opportunities; and (iv) identify the strategic priorities by building on successful approaches and initiatives and mobilizing relevant resources and partnerships.

Human Resource Development (HRD)

In Digital Bangladesh, best-of-breed and most cost-effective technologies and digital contents will be used to produce 21st century skills and confidence in students to compete in the globalized world. ICT for education or e-education will be leveraged to tackle the most difficult-to-teach and difficult-to-learn subjects such as mathematics, science, and language. E-education will provide vocational and 'lifelong education' opportunities to the youth and adults in order to retool them and build newer skills to improve their productivity. At the same time, it is necessary to develop ICT literacy of a critical mass of people at various levels to lead a sustainable



implementation of the vision.

Connecting the Citizens

Ensuring access to the Digital Bangladesh for all citizens, poor or rich, literate or illiterate, urban or rural is another foundation stone of Digital Bangladesh. As the government moves to delivering information and services through different ICT channels, citizens' awareness, capacity and access to these services must commensurately grow. Care will be taken to ensure optimal use of technologies such as mobile phone, radio, TV that are already in the hands of millions. Shared ICT access points in public locations such as local government institutions, post offices, and schools will be established. Bangla content and locally relevant content will be developed and delivered through these channels. Two-way communication channels to promote participation of grassroots in decision making and provide feedback to the government will be instituted.

Digital Government for Pro-Poor Services

Service delivery to citizens anytime and anywhere is made possible through creative use of ICTs such as one-stop service counters, helpdesks, etc. e-services will ensure not only a higher degree of efficiency in the delivery mechanism but will improve transparency and accountability within the government and non-government service provider organizations. Red-tape and opportunities for corruption will be drastically reduced by lowering the number of interactions, especially face-to-face interactions, between the service providers and recipients. Underserved and hard-to-reach population will receive equitable access to services.

At the same time, the planning, implementation and monitoring process of the government including the field administration will be strengthened through the use of decision support systems. These systems will enjoy sharing of data and information across various agencies of the government transcending ministry and geographic boundaries.

It is important to recognize that automation or digitization will not result in cutbacks of human resources in government. The ICT-based delivery channels and services will create new choices, whenever possible, without eliminating existing ones.

ICT in Business

The final pillar of Digital Bangladesh deals with three broad issues namely access to market, business productivity, and ICT industry for local and export markets. ICT-based market access mechanisms will not only benefit disadvantaged producers and businesses by ensuring equitable access to domestic and international markets but also will enable the government to establish transparent and efficient market monitoring.

The private sector including MSME will be made more productive and globally competitive by lowering the cost of doing business through G2B services.

Finally, the ICT industry will be supported to develop its human resource capacity and marketing strength to compete locally and globally. The ICT industry, including the telecom industry, as the technical partner in building Digital Bangladesh needs to be bolstered to sustain the Digital Bangladesh concept. At the same time, the industry, especially the IT-enabled services sub-sector, is envisaged to be a substantial national driver for growth through export earnings and employment of youth.

Vital Developmental Sectors

The goal of Digital Bangladesh is to develop ICT systems, infrastructure and human resource for strengthening the vital developmental sectors to make a direct positive impact on the key social and economic indicators. The sectors included in the strategy include:

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| 1) Agriculture | 5) Social Safety Nets | 8) Law Enforcement and Judiciary |
| 2) Health | 6) Disaster Management, Environment & Climate Change | 9) Parliament |
| 3) Land Administration | 7) Commerce and Investment | 10) Civil Service |
| 4) Local Government | | |

For each of the sectors, the strategy will (i) identify the existing policy goals and statements with regards to the use of ICTs towards improvement of the developmental outcomes in the sector; (ii) identify the specific areas in which ICTs can play a significant role; (iii) analyze the progress so far with respect to innovative use of ICTs; and (iv) identify the strategic priorities taking into account the gaps between the potential role of ICTs and existing initiatives that use ICTs. The following ~~table~~ paragraphs lists key results targeted for various sectors.

Agriculture: to increase efficiency and equity in the agricultural sector, improve competitiveness of farmers through on-demand information and knowledge, reduce exploitation caused by lack of market information, and enhance participation of farmers in decision-making.

Health: to facilitate improvement in areas such as health administration, capacity building of health workers, access to health information and healthcare service delivery. These include issues such as regular reporting on disease dynamics and related interventions, monitoring of field-staff, managing epidemics, on-demand access to health information by citizens and also by field-staff for better service delivery, and healthcare service delivery through telemedicine and remote consultation networks.

Land Administration: to reform land administration and expand land-related services to citizens through digitized record-keeping of khatians and maps, land-related information services to citizens in a hassle-free way, land revenue management through authentic reporting and tracking of land-related taxes, and efficient decision-making regarding use of lands under government control.

Local Government: to strengthen the functioning of local government institutions, particularly by turning them into robust information and service delivery points for local communities, and establishing interactive platforms to promote citizens participation and feedback.

Social Safety Nets: to ensure more accurate targeting of beneficiaries, improve delivery of benefits, and reduce pilferage in the administration and management of social safety net programmes. ICT-based decision support systems will be developed to evaluate impact of such programmes.

Disaster Management, Environment and Climate Change: to enhance efficiency in managing natural disasters, particularly in the country's predictive capabilities, management of disaster and post-disaster situations through access to real-time information by government officials, dissemination of information to the affected, and regular monitoring and tracking of data relevant to assessing impact of climate change.

Commerce and Investment: to improve investment climate of Bangladesh and reduce the cost of doing business, particularly in areas such as export and investment promotion through access to regularly updating economic data in an easily accessible format, automated procedures related to setting up new business and bringing investments into Bangladesh, online tender processes to promote transparency and competitiveness.

Law Enforcement and Judiciary:	to improve law and order situation in the country, particularly in court management covering automated updating of cause-lists and hearing days, and easily accessible information services for citizens regarding procedures and regulations regarding law enforcement and judiciary. Crime data management covering digitized information on crime patterns, criminal records, etc. will improve the law enforcement capacity of the government.
Parliament:	to leverage ICT platforms to improve the existing communication channels between the members of parliament and their constituencies and enhance the quality and speed of decisions in the parliament by establishing decision support systems.
Civil Service:	to drive continuous improvement of service delivery (Delighting the Customers), create an environment of professional development and performance-based career movement (Investing in People) and a culture of change management (Organizing for Adaptation and Resilience). Spurring innovative service delivery methods, creating a knowledge management platform for developing individual capacity and institutional memory, networking all government offices to implement the Right to Information Act, establishing e-portfolios of officers for performance management are all examples of areas where ICTs will be used as indispensable tools. ICTs will be utilized as the most cost-effective and widespread channel for establishing a constant interactive platform for dialogue with citizens, civil society and private sector, receiving citizens grievances on service delivery and feedback on policy decisions, and publishing results for mass dissemination.

Enabling Environment

Some factors are key to fundamental in developing an enabling environment for mainstreaming objectives of Digital Bangladesh into national developmental goals. The most important enablers for realizing Digital Bangladesh include:

- 1) Institutional Framework
- 2) Policy and Legal Framework
- 3) Banking and Financial Transactions
- 4) Delivery Channels for taking Services to Citizens' Doorsteps
- 5) Financing Strategies and Public-Private Partnership Framework

For each enablers, the strategy will analyze current situation with specific focus on challenges, while building on progress made so far. Particular emphasis will be given on relevant lessons learnt from other countries.

Institutional Framework: The Prime Minister's Office is providing the high-level stewardship of the Digital Bangladesh agenda and strategy formulation. The National Digital Task Force, chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister, has the responsibility for monitoring the major milestones and steering any course corrections. The Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister chairs the Executive Committee of the Digital Task Force and the Ministry of Science and ICT (MoSICT) acts as the Task Force's secretariat.

Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) under MoSICT develops the ICT Policy and ICT Act and is responsible for monitoring the implementation. All line Ministries have responsibilities

for delivering specific action items of the ICT Policy. In this regard, each Ministry and Division has an e-Governance Focal Point responsible for planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring of e-service delivery and e-administration initiative and coordination among the subordinate agencies. The Focal Points are encouraged to take on new initiatives beyond what is prescribed in the ICT Policy 2009.

As far as decentralization of e-service delivery is concerned, the field administration and local government institutions have definite roles to plan and implement Digital Bangladesh initiatives coordinated by the Cabinet Division and Local Government Division respectively. The Ministry of Establishment is playing a lead role to embed the Digital Bangladesh agenda in its strategic activities including the civil service reform efforts.

The Election Commission is the caretaker of the national ID card which is being explored as a potential e-service delivery platform. The government is exploring an appropriate institutional framework to leverage this platform for e-service delivery and develop necessary standards and frameworks. The Parliament's role in guiding the pro-poor strategic direction of Digital Bangladesh cannot be overemphasized too.

Policy & Legal Framework:

This Digital Bangladesh policy framework currently is largely being driven by ICT Policy 2009, ICT Act 2009 and International Long Distance Telecommunications Services 2009. Implementing the Right to Information Act 2009 is expected to expedite the translation of Digital Bangladesh vision into reality. Explicit efforts are being taken by related government agencies to mainstream ICT for development issues in their respective sectoral policies such as health, education, disaster management, etc.

Banking and Financial Transactions:

This involves developing infrastructures for facilitating financial inclusion for the poor and for creating a modern financial system that will not only be robust and efficient but also will have effective control and balance in place. The focus will include spurring economic activities by removing regulatory barriers to facilitate online commerce and to promote faster and more secure money transaction by reaching out to those outside the banking system. The overall aim is to promote efficiency by private sector growth through a robust financial system and ensuring equality through financial inclusion to the unbanked.

Delivery Channels for taking Services to Citizens' Doorsteps:

This covers issues of what ICT-based delivery channels are - or can be - used for solving the last mile problem in taking services to citizens in disadvantaged areas. The old ICTs such as TV and radio are becoming more and more localized and interactive, while the newer ICTs such as computers and mobile phones are becoming cheaper and gaining reach – a combination of which are providing increasingly exciting opportunities for extending services and engaging the private sector as partners in the process. Another issue of access is shared access points which enables community access rather than individual-based.

Financing Strategies and Public-Private Partnership Framework:

This covers issues of scope for public-private partnership for realizing Digital Bangladesh, particularly in areas of e-Governance. The primary focus is on identifying modalities where the private sector can co-invest and generate revenues from providing a particular service on behalf of the government.