

Regional Inclusive Growth Project (Diginomics-I) India – Vietnam – Philippines

Background

Digital tools and platforms have provided immense benefits to the consumers. It has enabled the last mile consumers, access to affordable products and services, ability to compare and make informed choices, stay connected socially, enriched knowledge on various aspects and much more. The core to such changes are the disruptive businesses and technologies. The conventional business models had limited impact due to physical limitations such as need of brick and mortar structures, longer wait time, limited options and coverage, higher costs, etc. The Digital platform allays such requirement constraints, which has led to its success.

Despite the benefits, approximately half of the global population is devoid of access to internet services.¹ In India, Vietnam and Philippines, the digitally excluded population accounts to 65.6%, 48.6% and 48% respectively.² Progressive measures are required by the government to capacitate consumers and making them adept in realising and utilising the benefits of digital tools and platforms, apart from enhancing affordability and accessibility. The governments should also facilitate the producers to innovate and provide services to consumers.

Within the framework of the Diginomics-I Project (2017-2018), being undertaken by CUTS Institute for Regulation and Competition (CIRC) and implemented by the Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS International)³, three country reports are to be prepared for India, the Philippines and Vietnam. This study will highlight the need to strengthen digital economy while focusing on three key actors, Government, Producers and Consumers with deeper emphasis on Consumers. Best practices from across sectors and geographies, to showcase the benefits to the consumers, associated with digital platforms, will be highlighted in the study.

The study will identify bottlenecks and barriers to the growth of digital economy in each project country. Throughout the study, the objectives will be synced to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The reports would embed measures, which would help removing barriers, improving digital literacy and empowering consumers/citizens in these countries. The study will also recommend evidence based measures to bolster the digital economy, in the respective jurisdiction. Finally, the reports will end with a SLOT analysis, considering a situation where all project recommendations are seamlessly adopted and implemented.

Objective

The country reports will establish that consumers have benefitted from the advent of digital tools and platforms. This will also be highlighted that such tools and platforms have helped the enhancement of standard of living for the users. Thus, greater the digital inclusion, the higher will be the inclusive growth. Next, the research will identify bottlenecks and barriers to proliferation of digital economy in each of the programme countries, and identify potential

opportunities for boosting connectivity and e-participation. In order to capacitate consumers on optimally using the digital tools and platforms, to their benefit, the programme envisages to build Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC). The MOOC will be available on both, the website and the mobile (Android) platform. The entire programme is envisaged to strengthen the framework for digital economy as well as improving digital literacy and empowerment of individuals, especially in fields of financial literacy, economic empowerment, education and health.

¹ *We are Social*, (2017, June). *DIGITAL IN 2017: GLOBAL OVERVIEW*. Retrieved from: <https://wearesocial.com/special-reports/digital-in-2017-global-overview>

² *Statista*, (2017, June). *Asia Pacific: number of internet users in selected countries 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/265153/number-of-internet-users-in-the-asia-pacific-region/>

³ *Consumer Unity & Trust Society*, Website : <http://www.cuts-international.org>

Key Objectives

- Showcasing evidence of digital platforms benefitting consumers through existing examples
- Highlight the need to strengthen digital economy in each of the project countries
- Identify bottlenecks and barriers to the growth of digital platforms in each country and recommend appropriate policy and practice reforms
- Use of MOOC to capacitate and empower consumers

Methodology

This programme will follow the RANC model of CUTS International, which is Research, Advocacy, Networking and Capacity Building. The reports for each of the project countries will follow the methodology, as given below:

- **Desk research:** Extensive literature review would be undertaken to gather evidence/information on the baseline scenario. It will also help in mapping and assessing the existing framework for digital economy and issues, which may hinder the digital aspirations of the country. Secondary data, statistics and information will help in forming linkages between political, social and cultural factors and the stakeholders (inclusive)
- **Stakeholder Interactions:** Stakeholder Interactions via online means or in person to gather primary information about the experiences and perceptions of digital tools and platform users, and case studies of successful individuals would be undertaken. Other modes such as social media, online discussion group etc. may also be used
- **Draft Report:** Based on the observations emanating from primary and secondary research, draft country reports will be prepared. These will encompass important findings of the research and stakeholder interactions
- **Focus group discussion (FGD):** The country research team would organize a FGD, among relevant stakeholder group representatives. During the FGD, the draft country report would be discussed/ validated for further refinement
- **Final Report:** From the suggestions emanating from the FGD, relevant changes will be made to the draft report, before being finalised and made ready for dissemination

- **Events:** To mark the launch of the project, a launch event will be organised in each of the project countries. Apart from this, there will be one Final event, i.e. Regional Seminar, which would include participants from all three project countries, and beyond. This would allow us, not only to showcase project findings and recommendations, but also to enable comparability across project countries, promote synergies and explore the scope for extending the project, substantively as well as geographically.

Expected Outcomes

- Suggestions and recommendations for all three actors i.e. Government, Producers and consumers to promote digital tools and platforms
- Better capacitated consumers and enhanced used of digital platforms and tools
- Better understanding of impacts of digital economy on Inclusive Growth

Outputs

- Project Brief
- Country Reports for India, Vietnam and Philippines
- Website and Mobile Application
- MOOC to empower consumers
- Event reports
- Op-eds

Project Partners

CUTS International is the principle implementer of the project and will implement the project in India, along with overseeing the work in other countries. CUTS Hanoi Resource Centre (HRC)⁴ and Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)⁵, will implement the project in Vietnam and Philippines, respectively.

Duration

The Project is scheduled for 18 months (May, 2017 – December, 2018).

⁴ CUTS - HRC (Hanoi Research Centre), Hanoi, Vietnam. Website: <http://cuts-hrc.org/en/>

⁵ Philippine Institute of Development Studies, Manila, Philippines. Website: <http://www.pids.gov.ph/>