

Reimagining India's Digital Public Infrastructure Globally for Attaining the SDGs

Sunday, 17 September 2023 | 1400-1600 hrs (IST) (GMT+5:30)

Background Note

It is now well established that the incorporation of digital technologies can facilitate the fulfilment of the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). These SDGs, established in 2015 consist of 17 global objectives that aim to tackle diverse social, economic, and environmental issues by 2030. This year, 2023, will mark the half-way point to the deadline set for achieving these SDGs, thus necessitating optimal use of digital technologies to accelerate the process.

The [SDG Digital Day](#), an initiative by the International Telecommunication Union, seeks to prioritise data and digital technologies to stimulate increased efforts across all the 17 goals, ranging from poverty eradication and inequality reduction to universal access to clean water, sanitation, and affordable, clean energy for all individuals globally. SDG Digital Day is celebrated on 17 September every year.

The Global South, particularly, is plagued with a digital divide on social, cultural, and economic aspects. These countries face disadvantages in terms of participation and types of digital engagement. Even while internet access has increased, new inequalities have arisen based on gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels. Additionally, disparities in digital skills, competencies, and motivations have emerged. The rapid progress of digital technologies' infrastructure is essential for bridging this digital divide to enable the achievement of sustainable development goals. By utilising digital technologies, the pursuit of the SDGs can be expedited, leading to enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and inclusivity in finding solutions.

According to the UNDP Report 2023 titled '[Digital Public Goods for the SDGs](#)', Digital Public Goods (DPGs) can be modified and duplicated to assist nations in attaining their national priorities and the SDGs. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), as or using DPGs, can

thus be modified and duplicated. DPIs are solutions and systems that facilitate the efficient delivery of essential functions and services across the public and private sectors throughout society.

The DPI in India such as Aadhar (identification), Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), among others are collectively called 'India Stack'. India has been using DPIs successfully and has achieved substantial [socio-economic inclusion](#). Technological advancements have enhanced inclusiveness; have significantly facilitated government services to marginalised communities in remote areas. Simplified e-governance processes ensure easy access to essential services and benefits for all citizens. Digital financial services have extended banking to the unbanked, offering them financial stability and credit opportunities. Educational platforms have empowered students in rural regions with knowledge and skills, while digital healthcare services have improved medical accessibility, especially during emergencies. Such digital infrastructure also fosters entrepreneurship and employment, creating economic prospects for marginalized groups. Overall DPI in India has been a catalyst for social inclusion by promoting the nation's progress and development.

The Government of [India is actively promoting](#) the concept of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and is willing to share its stacks with other countries. Though India's G20 Presidency has helped in amplifying this call, there is a need for global constituencies to push this further.

In this context, CUTS proposes to organise a virtual two-hour moderated and interactive panel discussion on 17th September, 2023 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. IST to commemorate SDG Digital Day. The panel discussion will focus on how Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) can contribute to the attainment of SDGs and how India's DPI can be reimagined globally.

Tentative Agenda

14:00-14:10	Welcome Address and Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navneet Sharma Director General, CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC)
14:10-14:25	Keynote Speaker <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Amar Patnaik MP, Rajya Sabha
14:25-15:25	Panel Discussion <p><i>Moderator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navneet Sharma Director General, CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC) <p><i>Panellists</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lorrayne Porciuncula Co-Founder and Executive Director, Datasphere Initiative• Hanani Hlomani Research Fellow, Research ICT Africa (RIA)• Parminder Jeet Singh Executive Director, IT for Change• Osama Manzar Founder and Director, Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)
15:25-15:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Q&A
15:50-16:00	Summing up and Vote of Thanks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navneet Sharma Director General, CUTS Institute for Regulation & Competition (CIRC)