



A4AI-Myanmar Coalition Meeting; Workshop on Gender-Responsive ICT Policy and Regulation; and Consultation on Myanmar Universal Service Strategy

November 17-18, 2016
MICT Auditorium, MICT Park, Yangon, Myanmar

The Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI)-Myanmar coalition, together with the Myanmar Computer Federation (MCF) and the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MoTC) organised a two-day event on 17-18 November 2016.

The **workshop on gender-responsive ICT policy and regulation** provided the participants with the opportunity to:

- explore affordable and equal internet access contributes to economic and social empowerment of women
- learn how several organisations are engaged in enhancing ICT uptake amongst girls and women in Myanmar and across the region
- discuss the latest research from Web Foundation and A4AI focused on gender and digital rights
- debate how digital Myanmar could drive women and girls empowerment
- discuss the status and potential of gender-responsive ICT policymaking in Myanmar

The **consultation on Myanmar's universal service strategy** engaged participants to:

- Learn what Universal Service means and why it is important
- Find out what the process, methodology and timeline is for developing the Universal Service strategy
- Explore how other countries achieve Universal Service
- Discuss success factors and challenges for Universal Service in Myanmar

The activities concluded with the **A4AI-Myanmar coalition meeting**—a platform for the four working groups to report on their progress and to plan for the next six months.

Gender-responsive ICT policy and regulation

The workshop, attended by over 60 people from Myanmar's public and private sector, witnessed experience sharing sessions by four innovative Gender and ICT projects apart from experts from South Africa, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines sharing their views.

Thank you to all the experts who shared their experience and made this workshop possible. An archive of the presentations and materials is available on the [A4AI-Myanmar page](#).

- Internet access as driver of socio-economic development for women: International experiences
 - **Helani Galpaya**, LirneAsia
 - **Osama Manzar**, Digital Empowerment Foundation
- Research on women's digital access in Myanmar
 - **Ari Katz**, IREX
- Examples of gender-focused initiatives
 - Digital Gender Gap Audit: Global Scorecards – **Ingrid Brudvig**, Web Foundation
 - Philippines Gender Scorecard – **Lisa Garcia**, Foundation for Media Alternatives
 - India Gender Scorecard – **Nandini Chami**, IT for Change
 - Tech Age Girls Myanmar – **Thae Nu San**
 - Geek Girls Myanmar – **Sandi Sein Thein**
 - CSR Initiatives at Ooredoo – **NayChi Su Mon**
- Gender disaggregated data and indicators in the ICT sector
 - **Htaike Htaike Aung**, Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO)





Many examples from India were shared and the report on gender audit conducted by the Web Foundation's Women's Rights Online (WRO) program was discussed in detail. Research conducted by international organisations such as IREX and LirneAsia, together with their partners in Myanmar such as the Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation and the Myanmar Book Preservation Centre, were presented to the participants.

The public sector was represented by a number of key officials including the Director General U Soe Thein and Director Than Htun Aung, and a director from the Central Statistical Office who underlined the need for Myanmar to embrace a system that helps them to disaggregate data to determine gender-inclusiveness in governmental programming. Apart from the three major telecom operators, the private sector participation included that of the infra companies, ISPs and start-ups. The civil society was represented by a large number of organisations from Yangon and also from the provinces.

The following key points emerged during the workshop for the multi-stakeholders to consider further in their efforts to ensure an inclusive spread of ICTs in Myanmar:

- There is a 30% gender gap in mobile phone ownership in Myanmar, skewed to men. Women usually use phones owned by others; hence, are unable to reap the fullest potential of the internet in their work. Mobile ownership among women makes a lot of difference in their business activities.
- Getting phones in the hands of men and women is important for the benefits of the tool can be accrued by both the genders, especially for enhancing their socio-economic benefits.
- With ICT interventions, markets function better while the individuals in households are better off as they are able to explore and exploit the tools on their own; however, externalities and generic conditions are important and are sure-shot compliments to ICT initiatives.
- It is important to improve generic governance institutions in Myanmar alongside ICT penetration. Real world compliments alone can enhance the impact of ICTs amongst people.
- In rural areas, the location of market matters a lot for both women and men suffer lack of access, hence, are unable to benefit from the potentials of the internet.
- With women earning less than men, many a times they are unable to afford the cost of access to the Internet and the cost of devices. They do, however, aspire to own high-end phones.
- Men have comparative edge over women for they possess digital skills and are able to acquire these easily. It is important to help spread digital skills among women in a focussed manner.

- Although women, in general, are able to make financial decisions, their perception, usability skills prevent them from investing in mobile phones. Skill development among women to exploit digital connectedness is key.
- Women entrepreneurs stand to benefit by not only being able to access content online, but also by understanding the market for business innovation. They are able to bring out a number of by-products of their main business through interactions online with their customers.
- To reach the last-mile, it is important to consider placing the technology in the hands of communities. Their ability to turn connectivity into a business opportunity is unquestionable.
- Connectivity experiments around the world where the local communities were able to exploit wireless technologies encourage governments to consider allowing unlicensed spectrum for ICT-enabled community development activities.
- Communities can bulk-purchase backhaul from telcos and turn that into a business activity for themselves. They can further distribute access and manage community broadband network the way they see profitable.
- Public libraries, community information centres, and other public access points make it easier to achieve last-mile connectivity.
- Lack of digital content in Myanmar language pose a major problem in last-mile connectivity; hence, it is important to consider a targeted approach to address the same.
- Similarly, lack of digital skills among communities, and, women in particular, serve as impediments to the growth in rural broadband. It is important to have a targeted program to address the skills-gap among women in rural and remote locales.
- There are a few digital literacy courses in Myanmar which the public sector might consider scaling-up as a nation-wide program; there are also academic teacher-based activities for use in schools as well as ICT toolkits for teachers.



The workshop also served as soft launch for IREX's latest research on [women's digital access in Myanmar](#), and the Web Foundation's [Digital Gender Gap Audit](#), including report cards for [India](#) and the [Philippines](#).

Experts gathered at the meeting highlighted the following points:

- Government of Myanmar, similar to the efforts undertaken in many nations, should ensure women have an online space that is safe and empowering.
- Experiments carried out by Ooredoo and their partner NGOs in installing lighthouses (telecentres) have illustrated the need to train a large number of people in digital skills.
- Innovative initiatives such as the “His or Her SIM” and digital literacy training for women entrepreneurs and teachers require replication and scale-up.
- E-Society development should align with national priorities pursued by various ministries
- The various provisions of the Telecom master plan require to be implemented, not only by the government, but by all multi-stakeholders concerned.
- The need for a comprehensive Cyber Crime Act is felt; however, enactment of such a law should be complimented by mass education on the limitations and opportunities of the Internet.
- National e-Government Plans require leverage of current efforts on gender mainstreaming by other ministries.
- Civic and political rights cannot be divorced from socio-economic development; hence, incorporating gender issues in the policy design is imperative.
- Gender disaggregation of data on internet use is important. One should be able to collect evidence on a) connectivity b) price c) quality of service, and d) product choice. It is also important to determine benefits accrued by men vis-à-vis women and urban market vis-à-vis the rural market.

The meeting ended with **Director Aung** reiterating the points made by **DG U Soe Thein** for gender-focussed policy development in Myanmar, while also assuring the participants of governmental commitment to ensure equal access to all.





Consultation on Universal Service Strategy

Myanmar has enshrined in its Telecommunications Act the installation of a Universal Service Fund that would serve, among other efforts, to bridge the service gap in rural and remote areas. Myanmar is currently working with consultants from Intelcon Research, with support from the World Bank to develop the universal service strategy, design the fund, and complete pilot projects.

Sonja Oestmann and **Andrew Dymond** of Intelcon are leading the consultation. The government has encouraged the consultants to use the A4AI-Myanmar coalition as a platform throughout their contract to incorporate multi-stakeholders views in the process. The first step in this ongoing consultation was a half-day meeting on November 18th.

The meeting reinforced the objective of Universal Service Fund—to ensure that all people in Myanmar have access to affordable telecommunications services, both voice services and broadband Internet.

The consultation was open to all stakeholders committed to increasing broadband access and affordability in Myanmar. As the first consultation of its kind, it sought to establish common understanding of the opportunities and challenges surrounding the fund.

- The idea of universal service was introduced in Myanmar in 2012, much before the reform process began, and when the entire telecom planning was operator-centred. However, with the reform process under way, the entire telecom domain became consumer-centred with key regulatory activities undertaken by the government.
- In the new regulatory regime, there would be at least 700 personnel assisting the work of the PTD to ensure universal services obligations are met and the consumer interests are protected. Among the many objectives, the three major ones the regulators would pursue are that of (a) managing competition, (b) facilitating ICT for development, and (c) changing the telecom development from one that was operator-centred to that of consumer-focussed.
- Of the four functions of the regulator, universal service finds a place apart from service licensing, market-based resources management and placing safeguards.
- Regular consultations with the stakeholders would help to design and implement the fund for the benefit of all.



As Intelcon highlighted in their introductory presentation, universal service strategy is important for it is a policy goal that all people in a particular country have access to voice and data services all the time.

A universal service strategy must consider:

- Availability: There is network coverage or broadband internet regardless of region or locality
- Accessibility: All inhabitants can access indifferent of their gender, race, tribe, religion, ability/disability
- Affordability: All inhabitants can afford to pay for access devices, cost of calls and services, minimum basket of certain national limit. One such recommendation is that of the A4AI's target of 1 GB data for less than 2% of per capita income.
- Ability: All inhabitants to have the basic ability to use telecom services based on their awareness, skills to use computers and devices and to navigate the internet.

Other key points that came forth during Intelcon's session:

- Universal service strategy is required for the commercial operators find it impossible to reach all people in a country, and the current obligations of Myanmar operators' stand at a 93% of coverage by 2018, which would still leave about 3.5M people.
- Universal policy shall ensure that the unserved people, including the 3.5M get served, both with voice and broadband as Myanmar's Telecommunications law mandates it
- Experiences of other countries reveal that in most cases the USF is managed by some form of a government body under the supervision of the regulator while only a handful of countries have in the past tried other means of administration
- Experiences also show that the Fund has been established in support of governmental economic policy and towards enhancing rural infrastructure, especially in terms of connecting rural schools, among various other investments such as the fiber build-out throughout the nation
- Universal strategy always touches upon issues pertaining to gender, education, health, online safety and security, government, content creation, economy, etc.
- Some nations such as Pakistan, Colombia and Mongolia have successfully managed implemented the Universal Fund during the past decade, mostly connecting remote locales, municipalities, community centres, schools across their nations.
- A few other nations have found the Fund useful in the school connectivity programs, mainly in ICT capacity building in schools, introducing ICTs in educational curriculum and as a strategy to stimulate demand amongst community members in rural areas



- The success was mainly accrued when the entire ecosystem of last-mile connectivity was targeted and funded in partnership with concerned ministries, strengthening their delivery systems through the innovative application of ICTs
- And, most of the funds were allocated through competitive bidding processes where transparency and fair means of allocating subsidy were achieved. Competition also helped to provide incentives for innovation and for minimising the cost.

The session also included highlights of some of the existing and new initiatives in Myanmar undertaken by UNOPS, Ooredoo, Telenor, IREX, MPT, Ericsson and Unesco. The session concluded with stories from Intelcon's visits to rural areas to assess the service gaps, as well as the early impacts of ICTs wherever available.

Discussions with the stakeholders were helpful in identifying the following success factors of USFs:

- Practical, feasible step by step approach
- Good governance and political support
- Proper consultation with all stakeholders
- Industry participation
- Competitive tendering – open/transparent distribution mechanisms
- Combination with innovative regulations
- Separate specific USF bank account
- Transparency: published annual accounts and reports
- Sunset clauses

The consultants also shared the intended methodology, process and the timelines for developing the strategy:

- First phase: Strategy development, which will blend infrastructure and service build-out while also supporting capacity building initiatives. As a tangible output, among others, the project shall develop guidelines for establishing the fund and its governance and operating procedures.
- Second phase: Implementation of a number of pilot projects, and monitoring and evaluation with a view to assess early benefits for citizens.

To achieve the above, the project aims to assess the extent of telecom coverage and analyse the needs there exist in rural and remote locations. For this, the project consultants shall engage with the industry, the A4AI-Myanmar coalition, and the various other stakeholders over the next three years.



The following next steps are being planned in the short-term:

- Undertaking of GIS map studies and Universal service scoping, including the review of existing initiatives
- Organising of the next stakeholder workshop in January 2017 to present a scoping report, followed by workshop on proposed universal service strategy in March 2017
- Conducting a workshop on detailed pilot project design in the first quarter of 2017

Update from A4AI-Myanmar Coalition

Data and Research Working Group:

- Identifying indicators and gaps in existing telecoms data; plan to coordinate with the Central Statistical Office to identify data gaps in their practice.
- Advocate for collecting new sets of data required for regulatory function
- Plan to participate in digital gender gap audit
- Creating ToR to hire a consultant to help identify the data gaps that prevail in the data collection practice of the various public sector entities

Infrastructure Development and Sharing Working Group

Working toward a number of outputs:

- Study on lease registration protection
- Change-of-use process that would allow infrastructure development on farm land
- Uniform building permit process imminent for infrastructure development and certain recommendations to PTD for 'objective' investigations and for 'objective' decisions when disputes are faced
- Production of generator noise guidelines after consultations with parties involved
- Guidelines for using public sector properties and for the concerns on EMF
- Explore possibility of possibilities of developing white papers for telecom development in a) protected areas and b) public infrastructure sharing in urban areas.



Taxation and Tariff Structures Working Group

- Preparing taxation fiscal map for ICT sector
- Plan to produce white paper for parliament submission
- Plan to produce a web page containing relevant tax information
- Explore how to offer tax rebates to level the playing field between foreign and local ICT companies

Universal Service Strategy Working Group

- Support Intelcon in their efforts to develop universal service strategy
- Facilitating collaboration amongst key ministries such as Transport and Communications, Education, Information, Land, and Border Areas.