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MGG
Managing Global Governance

Managing Global Governance (MGG) Alumni Meeting India 2018

"A Digital Agenda for Sustainable Development – Perspectives from India"

Report

Managing Global Governance (MGG) – Alumni Meeting India 2018

"A Digital Agenda for Sustainable Development – Perspectives from India"

12 – 13 April 2018

Senate Lounge, The Claridges, New Delhi, 12 Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road, New Delhi – 110011

Report by Rudraneel Chattopadhyay

Introduction

Information technology has, over the years, evolved from being an enabler to a driver, and institutions have started differentiating themselves on innovative IT adoption. Digitalisation is not just about technology implementation. It encompasses the transformation of business, enterprises and governments using technology, so as to make experiences better, communication effective and work simpler. Thus far, digitalisation has been characterised by four aspects - social media, mobility, analytics and cloud - commonly called SMAC. As SMAC evolves, new disruptions are emerging, especially in areas such as the Internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence and cognition, machine learning, 3D printing, drones and blockchain technologies. These disruptions, in turn, are fundamentally changing the way services are delivered and business operations are undertaken. There is a growing sense that digital is not just a buzzword, but has actually been contributing to GDP worldwide, with some studies showing the contribution to be about 20% globally.

The discourse surrounding digitalisation in India is equally optimistic, though at times faced with the source of all crucial questions, which is, at what cost and who is paying the price? As filmmaker Richard Serra originally said in a 1973 interview, and later popularised by Andrew Lewis on MetaFilter through 2010, 'If you are not paying for it, you're not the customer; you're the product being sold.' This notion captures the humanistic, anthropological and socio-political, albeit sceptical, side of the debate. Users in India are concerned about data protection, privacy, security, divides caused due to digitalisation - social, political, and cultural, and issues relating to a far-end apocalyptic consequence due to misuse of data by either people or machines who or which have the power to wield such outcome.

It is within this context, that it became incumbent on the MGG Network to spur discourse, consolidate opinions and find out what the network thinks about digitalisation as one of the most contentious issues of local, regional, national and international governance. What may be the possible interlinkages of digitalisation with the Sustainable Development Goals? This was the agenda which brought together partners and alumni from the MGG Network in India in April 2018.

Connecting over common experience (Day 1)

The meeting saw the participation of 26 alumni and around 8 external guests and partners from the MGG Network over the span of 2 days to engage each other in a healthy exchange of ideas around the several questions of digitalisation. Day one of the meeting was aimed at alumni interacting with each other in a space where they could connect on their past shared experiences of the MGG Academy. Alumni spoke with each other to envision the future of the MGG Network in India and deliberated on the support that they would require in order to sustain and engage all-round the members of the network – nationally as well as regionally and globally.

The participants were also invited to respond to a questionnaire that captured their personal opinion about the topic of digitalisation in the Indian context – what they considered as boons, what they feared, what topics flourished in the national discourse, and how they relate to it. The survey had a

behavioural angle to it where it sought to gauge how they would respond to certain situations where they would require to engage with digital elements and technologies directly. The survey results show that all participants agree on the positive role that digitalisation can play in sustainable development, for example through social benefit transfers to the poor, through reduced environmental externalities, improved access to knowledge and social inclusion. Similarly, all participants believe that digital communication channels lead to better international exchange. Most participants agree that digitalisation adds to life quality, leads to improved education and reduces social inequality. While the lack of data security and loss of privacy are seen as two of the most critical issues in terms of the negative aspects of digitalisation, the majority of respondents is in favour of e-governance.

Digital agenda for sustainable development (Day 2)

Designed to involve varied inputs ranging from experienced ones to nascently formed thoughts, the second day of the meeting had its tone set by Dr. Pramath Raj Sinha through his keynote on digitalisation and what it means to succeed in its desired outcomes and objectives. The address picked on how digitalisation of rigid systems does not serve the purpose unless holistically approached with the understanding of other socio-cultural elements that shape the context of the target audience. In line with this, measurable impact would count digital literacy as an indicator for success of digitalisation more than market penetration numbers. India's emphasis on a goal for digital success should be customizable, tailor-made, flexible solutions for people at grassroots, and not just the world-class or standard. The key takeaway from Dr. Sinha's keynote is that it is no doubt that technology is the solution to reach out to those places where brick and mortar institutions may not be the most successful. However, the process should allow for greatest flexibility, least structural hassles, scalability in terms of its actual knowledge and usability outcomes, and in the due course reduce inequalities, instead of furthering them. The answer to implementing such solutions at large scale is to break them down into cellular components at the local-self-government or district levels and then execute.

This address guided the participants into breakout groups where they further undertook nuanced discussion on the domains of e-governance and public services, data security and privacy, and socio-cultural issues and digital divide. Participants had chosen these topics for themselves through an e-voting system. In the sub-groups, the discussion dwelled on the following key questions, where discussants were invited to contribute with real or hypothetical examples:

- What are the opportunities for digitalisation in the domain?
- What are the threats of digitalisation in the domain?
- What are the pre-conditions of digitalisation in the domain?
- What are the necessary safeguards?
- What is the relation of digitalisation in this domain with sustainable development and the SDGs?

Having learnt from each other's perspectives in the sub-groups, participants discussed the impact of digital transformation in India. The format of the discussion allowed for a few key inputs by selected discussants on the impact of digitalisation in the area of digital divide, education, internet governance, and trade and commerce. While addressing the impacts of digitalisation in creating a social divide, Vidisha Mishra spoke about the evolution of digital haves and have-nots. She pointed out how the conversation about digitalisation is mostly about access and not impact and identified digital illiteracy, regressive socio-cultural norms, physical mobility and technophobia as barriers to full and complete digitalisation. At the same time, technology is not the solution to everything and too

much techno-optimism can lead to forceful digital measures which can further lead to lopsided development. Technology needs to interact with the changing needs of society and develop in tandem with it.

Dealing with the impact of digital transformations in education, Shreyasi Singh started out by laying out the structure of the online education market and the socio-cultural context for the online education space specific to India. With public spending on educational and related infrastructure being so less, it is becoming prominent that technology is the most potent solution. It has become more imperative than ever that the online learning model is perfected. Components that need figuring out to achieve this goal include: what kind of education goes online, role of teachers and faculty, what does the content look like, how does one validate online learning and skills learnt from it, and what regulation for such a space could look like. In the due course, it is possible that professional skilling and certification is also done through the digital medium.

Gangesh Varma brought to the circle the procedural aspect of internet governance, and its linkage with SDGs 9 and 16. India has moved to supporting a multi-stakeholder model of internet governance wherein multiple actors are involved from a very early stage. A transparent, accountable institution is needed that is flexible and can handle change because it is unknown what the future will be. He does note that because of technology, there could be exclusion. Also, issues such as privacy, data protection etc. can crop up. He highlighted that there is a need for constant update in technology from the moment it is adopted – and therefore, it is necessary to query whether we are ready to constantly update our technology and ourselves.

O. P. Wali, while talking in the context of commerce, queried if we (India) have leveraged our agendas as a provider of technology support and as an adopter of technology while participating in the technology revolutions. What collaborations should India engage in to reap best benefits from it for the manufacturing sector? He cited examples of how the Government eMarketplace (GeM) revolutionized the online public procurement space and brought in the choice between proactive vs. foresighted policymaking.

The group engaged in discussing how the emotional and human objectives of education can be achieved through digital delivery. Mentorship, and validation/quality control of content, came out to be additional components requiring focus. It also queried how practical it would be to deliver skill training online. What could be the hybrid forms on engagement?

There seemed to be a larger agreement that the responsibility of succeeding in the digital agenda for sustainable development does not solely rely on the government, and it is indeed an area for collective action in terms of agenda setting, structuring, funding, and implementation.

Next steps

Consequently, the group was invited to share their thoughts about how this discussion can be taken forward. What could possible future projects look like? How do the collaborations materialize ahead?

Simultaneously, another team worked on producing a video outcome of the meeting, the outline of which covered the opportunities, threats, and the deliberations of the 2 days in Delhi. It would indeed be interesting to see how the MGG network comes together on developing a group course of action in this area, as there exist numerous areas for collaboration. The context of emerging powers show great similarities and it will only be with time that discourse in the national contexts get shaped through dialogues across the MGG network.

Annex 1:

MGG Alumni Meeting India 2018

12-13 April 2018

"A Digital Agenda for Sustainable Development – Perspectives from India"

Thursday, 12 April	**(MGG alumni only)**
5.00 pm – 8.00 pm	**Welcome, High Tea, Warm up** - The MGG network in India - Present and Future of MGG: 2018-2021 - Online survey on digitalisation
8.00 pm	**Dinner**
Friday, 13 April	**(MGG network partners and invited participants)**
9.00 am – 9.30 am	**Welcome and introduction** Dr. Tatjana Reiber & Dr. Wulf Reiners – MGG Programme, DIE
9.30 am – 10.45 am	**Keynote: *Digitalisation as a driver for sustainable development*** Dr. Pramath Raj Sinha, Founder and MD, 9.9 Group; Founder and Trustee, Ashoka University; Provost, Anant National University; Founder, Vedica Scholars Programme for Women
10.45 am – 11.15 am	**Coffee break**
11.15 am – 12.45 pm	**Working Groups: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation - Perspectives on the national discourse in India**
12.45 pm – 2.00 pm	**Lunch**
2.00 pm – 3.30 pm	**Fishbowl Roundtable: The Impact of Digital Transformation in India** Moderator: Rudraneel Chattopadhyay – Associate, QCI Speakers: - Prof. Dr. Om Prakash Wali – Head (CITT), IIFT - Gangesh Verma, ICRIER - Shreyasi Singh – Head, Edtech Initiatives, 9.9 Media - Vidisha Mishra – Junior Fellow, ORF
3.30 pm – 4.00 pm	**Coffee break**
4.00 pm – 5.45 pm	**Ideas for follow-up activities** ***in parallel:* production of a short video "Conference Message from India"**
5.45 pm – 6.30 pm	**Closing remarks**
7.00 pm	**Dinner**

ANNEX 2

Brief of Opportunities and Challenges of Digitalisation in India

The bright side

Digitalisation has become a vital component in the growth of the Indian economy. The digital boom in India is driven by a concerted play of both supply and demand side factors. On the supply side, organizations, both private and public, have made a substantial amount of their service offerings online, primarily with a focus on reducing cost, improving efficiency, personalizing service, collecting user data, widening reach, etc. The Digital India campaign of the Government of India has accelerated the rate at which public service delivery is digitised. The demand side has been driven by the massive proliferation of the Internet, mobile devices and social media (including P2P messaging) platforms.

As per a report by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), there has been a 9.72% increase in Internet usage over the past year.[1] In India, mobile phone penetration is currently in the range of 65–75%. This is forecast to increase to 85–90% by 2020.[2] A report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India and IMRB International indicates that 77% of the users in urban areas and 92% of the users in rural areas consider the mobile phone as the key device to access the Internet owing to its cost-effectiveness and easy availability.[3] Social media introduced a lot of Indians to digital for the first time, and with 200 million WhatsApp users[4] and 250+ million Facebook users,[5] the trend continues.

The euphoria is not just confined to SMAC. IoT and mobile-to-mobile (M2M) technologies are in a phase of unprecedented innovation. India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology estimates that the size of the IoT industry will rise to 15 billion USD by 2020. This will indirectly lead to a growth in the use of connected devices from around 200 million to over 2.7 billion by 2020.[6] The plan of developing 100 smart cities will also result in the rapid expansion of IoT.

All these developments have created a lot of excitement, and both the private and government sectors are looking for key strategies to set up digital platforms and solutions. For the government, the shift to digital has primarily been about transparency and reach—taking services and resources in the healthcare, education and financial sectors to the rural population of India. While ambitious, these efforts mark a major paradigm shift in the planning of governance and service delivery.

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[1] Madanapalle, A. (20 Dec 2016) TRAI releases data on internet usage: subscription has grown 9.72 percent over previous year. Tech2. Retrieved from http://www. firstpost.com/tech/news-analysis/trai-releases-data-on-internet-usage-subscription-has-grown-9-72-percent-over-previous-year-3694519.html (last accessed on 1 May 2018)

[2] Sharma, S. (19 May 2017). Mobile phone penetration in India set to rise to 85-90% by 2020: report. Livemint. Retrieved from http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/ zxupEDYD560LJrnoRxcn4L/Mobile-phone-penetration-in-India-set-to-rise-to-8590-by-2.html (last accessed on 28 April 2018)

[33] Chopra, A. (1 March 2017) Number of Internet users in India could cross 450 million by June: report. Livemint. Retrieved from http://www.livemint.com/Industry/ QWzIOYEsfQJknXhC3HiuVI/Number-of-Internet-users-in-India-could-cross-450-million-by.html (last accessed on 28 April 2018)

[4] Tech Desk. (27 July 2017). WhatsApp now has 1 billion daily users, over 250 million on Status. The Indian Express. Retrieved from http://indianexpress.com/article/ technology/social/whatsapp-now-has-1-billion-daily-users-over-250-million-on-status-4768940/ (last accessed on 28 April 2018)

[5] PTI. (14 July 2017). India now has highest number of Facebook users, beats US: Report. Livemint. Retrieved from http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/ CyEKdaltF64YycZsU72oEK/Indians-largest-audience-country-for-Facebook-Report.html (last accessed on 28 April 2018)

[6] PTI. (26 Oct 2014). Govt aims to make $15-bn IoT industry in India by 2020. Business Standard. Retrieved from http://www.business-standard.com/article/ptistories/govt-aims-to-make-15-billion-iot-industry-in-india-by-2020-114102600119_1.html (last accessed on 1 May 2018)

Challenges

On the other hand, the rising levels of digitalisation and digital adoption, though noteworthy, are still not sufficient to bring the bottom layers of the pyramid under the coverage of digital benefits. This is a global challenge and impacts both developed and developing nations, albeit to varying degrees. Economic (extreme poverty) and social (high degree of illiteracy) factors are often universal, while India has some unique challenges of its own, accentuated by its vast geography and diversity of languages.

Connectivity: Internet penetration in India needs improvement. Access to digital services would require access network infrastructure which is capable of carrying growing levels of data traffic. Around 50,000 villages in India still do not have mobile phone connectivity.[7] Access to broadband connectivity in rural areas is work in progress. Such data connectivity divides not only debar a large percentage of Indians from accessing public services but also have the potential of further alienating them from the digital revolution. The BharatNet initiative aims to address this issue. The Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), under the Department of Telecommunications, Government of India, is working towards providing basic mobile connectivity in deprived areas.

Trust: A major hurdle is the inherent lack of trust among a large section of Indians towards using digital channels, especially for purposes such as banking transactions, payments and healthcare. A similar attitude prevails in government agencies as well, where regardless of large-scale digitisation, a lot of activities still need paper records. It may take some time for trust in digital modes to reach the desired levels.

Digital literacy: Basic digital literacy is lacking—that is, the ability to get on a computing device and use the services offered by the government and other service providers. Vernacular language: India has 22 constitutionally recognised languages. Any service or content that aims to reach citizens across the country has to cater to these regional languages and the sub-dialects of each language.

Security of data: A digital strategy has to be complemented by a robust information security framework which preserves the privacy and security of citizen and government data. This is significantly more important in areas like banking, payments, healthcare, smart cities, citizen biometrics and smart transport. Digital assets have often been found to be vulnerable to cyberthreats. A robust framework is not only needed to safeguard the assets but also vital from the point of view of gaining citizen trust.

[7] PTI. (12 April 2017). 50,000 villages don't have mobile network. The Telegraph. Retrieved from https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170412/jsp/frontpage/ story_145969.jsp (last accessed on 1 May 2018)