Bridging Digital Divide: Bangladesh Aspect

Md Shahid Uddin Akbar
CEO
womenBD.com
Turn the Local Women into Digital Work Force
A Project of Unicorn Systems
Room No. 107-108, Baitus Sharif Complex
149/A Airport Road, Tejgaon, Dhaka 1215, BANGLADESH
Tel: - 881 8 243935, 880-2-9121308, Fax: 880-2-9122798
E-mail: unisys@bdonline.com

Defining Digital Divide Gap

Who have the access to the Technology and who don’t have the access may be defined as Digital Divide. This divide is not only applicable for Information Technology, it generates at every aspect of our daily life. Some times it seems same as the division between Developed & Developing nations or Rich & Poor communities.

In narrow sense, only access to computer is the criteria for setting Digital Divide gap. But in broader perception, result oriented access in the internet and technology with interactive participation is the basis for differentiate the Digital Divide gap.

The term Digital Divide has become the front line issue in the IT as the world economy and life depends on computer technology & communication science. Every aspect of daily affairs is absolutely depends on computer, but the have not groups of the society are missing the facilities and developments of the IT revolution & falling far behind the high tech advantages. This backwardness of community is generating the Digital Divide gap in the society.

Bangladesh Aspect

The Digital Divide gap is narrowing in developed countries but in developing countries like Bangladesh, the gap is widening everyday. And the gap in the women community of Bangladesh is acute.

Reasons behind the Scene

Access to the Technology
The very first reason for Digital Divide in Bangladesh is that the telecommunications infrastructure is deficient. In Bangladesh, the telephone density is only about 0.5%, which is the main reason for insignificant internet connection in the country.

**Economic Barriers**

The economic condition of the people is one of the vital issue for computer use and internet connectivity. Generally, on average wealthy and educated as well as young, urban and male have the internet access, which appears that economic solvency & education are the major factor during internet diffusion. Most of which are not favorable in Bangladesh.

**Literacy Barrier**

Bangladesh is facing acute crisis of skilled computer user due to literacy problem. Information in the net is designed in the advance technology, which require adequate knowledge for the user. Moreover, overall less educated community who are not very computer friendly.

**Language Barrier**

Language problem is another vital issue for the local user of the internet/web. There are very few web sites available in local language i.e. in Bengali. Local people are not very much frequent / efficient in English as language.

**Lack of Local & Social Issues in the Net**

Contents in the web is not sufficiently enriched with information and services required by the local user. Still, local webs are concentrated with their product & service promotion. Information based web services have not yet available in the net with local information.

**Social & Cultural Environment**

As male group of the society can avail the web access facility from commercial centers or outside the home but the local women community of Bangladesh has limited access due to some social and cultural environment. Unfortunately, due to family obligation & service, they can not spare sufficient time for using the net.

**Problem of Technology Access & Use of Women**

The main backward community of our society is the women. They have a very limited access in the internet because of –
- Lack of Education
- Fear of Technology use
- Economic Condition
- Lack of English language
- Family responsibility
- Social aspect for availing internet facilities from outside
  - Working Environment and Professional Need Assessment

*Bridging Digital Divide Gap*

Computer and Basic literacy is a must to ensure the effective internet access, which is the critical lacking of local user. Simultaneously, contents of the web, language(English) deficiency make the access less effective.

We need to learn to adopt & apply technology appropriately. Only using technology effectively the Digital Divide Gap may be minimized.

Bridging digital Divide will make the professional as the key to preparing individuals to live productive lives.

We have still a series of extensive works to do from Govt. and private level for minimizing the gap.

Strategic Integration for industry partnership between Gov. initiatives and other organizations to foster the steps to minimize the digital divide gap and creating environment for the use of web.

We have to define the need of the user and know *What People Want* from the web.

*Resource Sharing Programs* for technology and expertise sharing between the IT Intellectuals and inexperienced web users for development.

*Digital Platform* to be established with the required infrastructure and facilities for common use of the general user of the society.

Donor agencies and UN organizations have to take realistic steps for generating projects to minimize digital divide gap.

*An Experience and Path for the future steps*
In late 1996, Grameen Phone (GP), a Grameen Bank concern, made a major breakthrough in the field of Rural Telecommunication, specially by making available Mobile Telephone service at nominal cost.

The experience of GP can be used and shared for establishing rural Telecommunication infrastructure. The module of Grameen Phone may also be followed to design National Telecommunication & Networking policy.

**Recommendation – Crossing the Border**

To make the internet and web more attractive and available for the user, we need –

- Interactive and real-time information support on market conditions for rural business people
- Make sure that “Opportunity Cost” will be reduced through using the internet service
- Services for Education, Employment, Health Service, Market / Business Information, Weather, Communication for the rural people
- Awareness program to be launched
- Govt. to go for infrastructure development
- NGO’s working in the rural area to be integrated with the program
- Wireless ISP service to be offered
- Discussion group and e-newsletter can be very effective tools to share the resources and information
- Digital Platform for accessing the web may be established