



Technology for common (wo)man

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OUR era is defined by technology. The potential to provide common man and woman with access to better education, healthcare and basic services like banking is possibly the most exciting transformative feature of technology. By doing so, it empowers every citizen to be more successful, productive and contribute greatly to their families, communities and domestic economies. However, even though India has proved its mettle in the information technology domain the country's performance at providing computing technology and internet access to its citizen has been tardy. In comparison to the other BRIC countries, India's performance in technological readiness is disappointing. A strong information infrastructure is a great lever of socio-economic development because it improves delivery and access to public services and strengthens democracy by giving the citizens a platform to participate. But it can only happen in a meaningful way when government, industry and policy makers embrace it as a national agenda and drive the right set of policies to ensure every citizen has the right to access, whether shared or individual, and knows how to use it effectively.

For India to rise ahead of the pack, digital infrastructure has to become a key component of national growth with concerted efforts in four main areas. The first is the building of information superhighways or broadband networks, second, the availability of a broad spectrum of devices, third, is a content and services that can maximize the potential of increased ICT penetration and connectivity and last but not the least is wide spread digital literacy and empowerment of the citizens to enable them to be skilled enough to use this infrastructure and access for their betterment.

Building these pillars of information infrastructure will require both government and private sector participation. The policy framework has to be such that not only encourages investments in deployment of broadband network in the country but also does so in manner that it remains affordable for the end user. If the cost of access to information is out of reach for the majority, the development gains from technology cannot be achieved.

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The private sector on its part has to invest in research and development to first understand consumer needs and build products and solutions to address their needs. In today's day and age, inclusive growth cannot materialize without equal access to information. What India needs is for the government, academia, research institutes and the private sector to work together to identify ways

to build out the information infrastructure in order to empower its citizens and ultimately boost economic growth.

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Digital Dividends of Asia