

India Contribution: Consultation for the GSR-20

Best Practice Guidelines Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-20)

Demonstrating regulatory thought leadership for digital transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a resilient digital infrastructure. The pandemic required people to stay back at home and perform all the necessary functions, including doing the office work, studying, entertainment, and shopping on-line. All this required support of the telecom network and overall ICT infrastructure. Thankfully, the telecom services in most parts of the world rose to occasion and supported the people's needs. This has been the reason why many societies have witnessed lesser economic pain.

The Government of India has taken full advantage of the digital infrastructure available in the country. It has been able to successfully transfer financial assistance to the needy directly to their account. This has been possible by linking the bank account of people with their mobile numbers and national ID called Aadhar. An amount equivalent of USD 5 bn was transferred to 160 mn beneficiaries.

Similarly, the Government of India launched a mobile application named 'Aarogya Setu' on 2nd April 2020 for Contact tracing, Syndromic mapping and Self-assessment" digital service during the COVID -19 Pandemic. The penetration of mobile services and end-to end digital connectivity has been the enabler for this implementation and the app has been very successful in contact tracing.

The regulators need to focus on connecting the unconnected. We need to reach the remotest area to extend broadband availability at a satisfactory speed. This will facilitate delivery of various government services to the people and will also enable them to market and sell their produce, at the right price, to a distant market. ICT availability to all will ensure keep us ready to face any future health risks with greater alacrity.

Vectors of regulatory action: Inclusiveness, agility, and resilience

Regulatory mechanism which are technology neutral and readily adaptable to ever changing conditions and different approaches should be considered to improve the inclusiveness, agility, and resilience of digital networks for overall digital transformation. Regulations must be treated as a dynamic tool and to be continuously examined, evaluated, and improved to achieve its aim of advancing the economic development and well-being of society. Risk management, planning & implementing regulations, and reviewing & assessing the impact of the regulations on how public policy is carried out must form an institutional mechanism so that the regulator enjoys predictability and sustainability.

Soft-touch regulation is the order of the day. We need to facilitate adaption of latest technologies in the network so that human efficiencies can be increased. The regulation should be such that it allows introduction of new technologies and services while ensuring the network security and integrity.

Collaboration across sectors, cooperation across borders, and engagement across the boards

The penetration of IoT and M2M, coupled with the higher speeds of 4G and 5G telecom networks, will see their usage across the sectors. Such a situation will call for synergy and cooperation with the regulators of various sectors. It is well understood that telecom regulation alone will not suffice under this situation. This has already been proven in the case of e-commerce platforms where the performance of telecom infrastructure is monitored through telecom regulations while the commerce is regulated by that sector.

To be better prepared for any catastrophe man made or natural, international cooperation should be strengthened. Transparent and structured coordination among various stake holders in the decision-making process will facilitate in establishing mechanisms for consultation and information exchange to tackle crises such as that caused by COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate economic recovery and sustainable development. Regulatory bodies must determine and maximize their potential to identify and make use of the international cooperation instruments available to support ICTs and their impact on the economy and society of today and tomorrow.

Enhancing digital cooperation will require both reviving existing multilateral partnerships and potentially the creation of new mechanisms that involves regulators and other stakeholders such as, governments, technologists, academicians and, the private sector. This is important to better understand the opportunities for telecom sector to drive digital transformation that is taking place and tools to create a policy environment that enables their economies and societies to prosper in a world and also deal efficiently with the global crisis like COVID-19. We all can join hands together to transform our future, the digital way. By acting early and taking decisive actions, we can accelerate the digital transformation and reach the next normal sooner.

Submitted by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)