

Narratives on Digital Bangladesh: Shared Meanings, Shared Concerns

Dr. Jude Genilo

Head of the Media Studies and Journalism Department
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

Mr. Md. Shamsul Islam

Associate Professor of the Media Studies and Journalism Department
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

Ms. Marium Akther

Lecturer and Department Coordinator of the Media Studies and Journalism Department
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

Keywords: Policy, Strategy, Governance, Citizen

Author Details:

Professor Dr. Jude William Genilo is the Head of the Media Studies and Journalism Department, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). Prof. Genilo earned his Doctor of Philosophy and Master's Degree in Communication from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. He also has undergraduate degrees in Economics and Management from De La Salle University-Manila. Before joining ULAB, Prof. Genilo headed the postgraduate programme of a prestigious communication school in Jakarta, Indonesia and served as a research fellow at the Kasetsart University Research and Development Institute (KURDI) in Bangkok, Thailand. He has received numerous awards such as ASIA Fellows Awards for 2004-05 and the UN Foundation-International Communication Association Research Grant Award. He is author of the book: Community-Based Communication: A New Approach to Development Communication.

Md. Shamsul Islam is an Associate Professor at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). Before joining the ULAB he was an Associate Professor and Acting Chair, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Stamford University Bangladesh. He worked as a researcher at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) for 11 years. He joined the BIISS as a Research Associate in 1994 and later became a Research Fellow at the International Studies Division. He received his BA (Hons) and MA (First Class First) degrees in Mass Communication and Journalism from University of Dhaka. He also obtained his second Masters in International Communications from University of Leeds, UK having received a British Chevening Scholarship. In 2002, he was a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, Wolfson College of Oxford University, UK. His research interests are: International media and communications and international politics especially, political developments in South Asia and in the Middle East, foreign policy and security issues etc.

Marium Akther is a Lecturer in Media Studies and Journalism as well as the department coordinator at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. She is also the faculty advisor of Media club, one of the 14 clubs of ULAB. Before Joining ULAB in 2005 she was working as Sub editor in United News of Bangladesh. Marium has an interest and background in working on Gender and Media issues. She is also interested in Development communication. She is a post graduate in Mass Communication and journalism from Dhaka University of 2002. She has worked on Strategic guideline for Media Relations for Actionaid Bangladesh. She has written on SMS: the communication explosion of the decade and Images of Women in TV Advertisements. At present Marium is researching about the trustworthiness of television news in Bangladesh at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh as well as writing a book chapter on E-learning. She is also writing a book chapter on Gender Equality in Bangladesh: the changing landscape. Marium is assistant editor of two journals named "Communica" and "Bangladesh Journalism Review", A Bangladesh Centre for Development, Journalism and Communication publication.

Abstract:

One of the campaign promises of the interim Awami League government was a “Digital Bangladesh” by 2021. What the phrase exactly meant remained unclear. Political speeches offered little clues amid the jargon. Hence, some political analysts think that the government simply wanted a political slogan that associated them with modern and progressive thinking. Such was done to win over the educated and young voters, who demanded from the government a strategic emphasis on using Information and Communication Technologies. In using such a catchy slogan, however, the government placed “Digital Bangladesh” on the public agenda. Academic conferences, roundtable discussions and media stories have been executed in its name. This paper looked at the emerging narratives concerning “Digital Bangladesh” to provide some direction to the current government regarding popular consensus - particularly the shared meanings and shared concerns taking shape. It sought to answer the question: What are the understandings of Digital Bangladesh by the various sectors of society – government, business, media, academe, information technology and civil society? The paper used a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory design using the research methods of document examination, interviews and discourse analysis.

From the data, the paper illustrated that there were still no clear definitions, goals and roadmaps on Digital Bangladesh. However, there existed a consensus regarding its beneficiaries, scope, components and feasibility. The study recommended that government continue with and expand the dialogue on Digital Bangladesh, particularly in areas where there have been no clear shared meanings. Government should likewise take off from emerging consensus and address the shared concerns, especially in designing future policies.

Main Text:

Introduction. The people of Bangladesh are in dialogue and the topic is about their future – a future that is encapsulated by the phrase “Digital Bangladesh.” Ironically, the dialogue began unintentionally. One of the political parties, the Awami League (AL), successfully used the catchy slogan to win a major victory in the December 29, 2008 election. With the catchphrase having served its purpose, post-election euphoria fading and several pressing problems to confront, “Digital Bangladesh” should have lost its sparkle. But, it did not. Instead, government officials, business leaders, media personalities, academicians, non-government organization (NGO) heads and Information Technology (IT) specialists have developed their own narratives about “Digital Bangladesh.” With these narratives, they have started engaging in conversations in the public sphere about what “Digital Bangladesh” should be – whether it should pertain to a knowledge-driven economy or simply going digital through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); whether it is a feasible undertaking or not; whether it should deal with the digital divide or not; whether to use the old or develop a new roadmap on it; and many more.

In light of these developments, the paper looked at the emerging narratives and ensuing conversations about “Digital Bangladesh” in order to provide some direction to the current government regarding popular consensus - particularly the shared meanings and shared concerns taking shape. It sought to answer the question: What are the understandings of Digital Bangladesh by the various sectors of society – government, business, media, academe, IT and civil society? Concretely, the study objectives were as follows:

- To find out the assessments regarding the present situation of Bangladesh in terms of E-governance, E-business, Cyber Security, ICT Infrastructure/Media Convergence and the Digital Divide;
- To determine the understandings of Digital Bangladesh in terms of definition, scope, stakeholders, pillars, benefits, challenges and roadmap; and
- To provide recommendations to the government in translating the vision of “Digital Bangladesh” into a reality.

The paper is significant due to the following reasons. First, it documented a case wherein various societal sectors actively participated and are still participating in national communication policy making in a

developing country – the creation of a vision and the formulation of a roadmap for building a knowledge-based society. The importance of such participation needs to be underscored since as Dahlgren (2002) stated “citizens are less engaged than ever, politics as a topic of discussion is rapidly nose-diving.” Second, it illustrated how political spin such as Digital Bangladesh has been transformed into an aspiration of a people. Although not clearly understood, citizens accepted it to mean a brighter future. In this light, the spin did not die down as expected. Instead, it paved the way to more questions, answers and dialogues. Third, it showed that the mass media can depart from its usual transmission approach – media exposure, talks about media outputs, opinion formation and political participation – in forming public opinions. In the case of Bangladesh, the mass media (particularly print and online publications) took the lead in facilitating dialogues through roundtable discussions on Digital Bangladesh. The mass media not only transmits information, it can actively pursue the exchange, negotiation and sharing of meanings.

The paper is novel since most writings on Digital Bangladesh so far merely illustrate the position of a particular sector – not several stakeholders. Moreover, these materials do not possess a relational perspective whereby participants to the dialogue learn, share and connect with each other. More often than not, authors utilize a confrontational approach; one sector’s interest conflicting with the other. This paper is divided into the following sections: the birth of the slogan; slogan paves way for dialogues, the role of dialogues in deliberative democracy, narratives on Digital Bangladesh, and summary, conclusion and recommendations.

The Birth of the Slogan. In its Election Manifesto 2008 entitled “Vision 2021 Bangladesh: A New Horizon,” the AL party framed their campaign with “right to vote and food” as “key to poverty alleviation.” According to the party, “the country stands at the crossroad of history. After a seven year period of misrule and emergency, there is going to be a free, fair and peaceful election to parliament on 29 December 2009.” In light of this, it presented its promise, work program and declaration with its five priority areas and other important programs. The reference to “Digital Bangladesh” can be found in the latter under Human Resource Development. To quote the manifesto: “The potential of ICT sector will be realized. Software industry and IT services will be developed by providing all possible assistance to talented young people and interested entrepreneurs. This measure will increase export and promote employment opportunities. Our vision is to make **Bangladesh digital** in 2021. IT education will be made compulsory at secondary level by 2013 and at primary level by 2021. . . High-tech park, software technology park, ICT incubator and computer villages will be set up at suitable locations in the country.” (*Emphasis Ours.*)

In explaining the manifesto, however, the party selected and highlighted such reference – connecting it with a modern future but also linking it with the nation’s past. The news report “Vote for Boat for Digital Bangladesh” dated December 17, 2008 covered the final days of the AL campaign trail. During the Victory Day celebration, then candidate Sheikh Hasina declared: “On this auspicious occasion of Victory Day I call upon you to mark another victory in the election so that we can present the nation a modern, developed and enlightened Bangladesh free from corruption.” After laying down wreaths at the National Martyrs’ Memorial, she exclaimed that “although the nation achieved freedom, its hopes and aspirations are yet to be fulfilled as many people including the freedom fighters remain starved while people’s fundamental rights for food and franchise were snatched away in the past. Democracy in the country was destroyed by repeated promulgation of martial law in the country over the years. For this reason, we have announced, in our election manifesto, the vision 2021 for establishing democracy on a strong footing when the country would celebrate the golden jubilee of our independence.” In campaign rallies in the succeeding days, Hasina made other electoral promises. At Munshiganj, she promised to build new mills and factories to generate employment – building a “Digital Bangladesh” to cope with the challenges of the 21st century. At Shyampur Balur Math, she lambasted the opposition party for wanting “to make Bangladesh a nation of beggars. While in power, they had preferred to create deficiency in food to receive foreign aid . . . But, we made Bangladesh a food-surplus nation.”

Throughout the election campaign, Hasina projected her party as modern and forward looking but with strong links to the past. At Faridpur, she remarked that getting the people’s mandate in 1970, AL freed the country from Pakistan occupation forces, attained food autarky in 1996 and they would bring economic emancipation of people if they get the mandate in 2008. These ideals were summed up in the phrase “Digital Bangladesh,” which was understood as then Candidate Hasina’s promise to the nation. “There may be a realization among the politicians that digitization is synonymous with being modern and forward looking, and that investment in ICT is important for national development,” rationalized City University of New York Professor

Swapan Kumar Gayen. However, “questions need to be asked though: What is the scope of Digital Bangladesh? What are its mission and goals? Is there a roadmap to achieve the desired end?” London School of Economics (LSE) Researcher Delwar Hussain replied: “Digital Bangladesh shares with all good political slogans a malleable, reverberative quality. The details of what it might entail have always been sketchy. Sheikh Hasina’s speeches during huge election rallies offered meager clues amid the jargon and sound bytes.” He continued “this may sound cynical. But, in a country where electricity is as intermittent as girls from poor homes being able to complete their full high-school education, the proclaimed Digital Bangladesh already had the whiff of a vote-catching election gimmick.”

In the Daily Star-Nielsen Opinion Survey on the Government’s 100-day Performance Rating, published on April 16, 2009, one question posed to 2,520 respondents from across the country was: “What do you understand by digital Bangladesh?” The newspaper reported that “Interestingly, 52 percent of the respondents could not say anything about it. Twenty-three percent said they are not clear about the idea and 17 percent feel they think it meant computerization of the society. Female and rural people are more confused about the idea than their urban counterparts.” Moreover, three percent of respondents associated the slogan as a “political word,” another three percent as “developed Bangladesh” and two percent as “modern Bangladesh.” The average age of respondents was 35 years old; ranging from 18 to 86.

But, even if they were unsure of what Hasina meant by it, the people of Bangladesh resonated with Digital Bangladesh. University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) Associate Professor Tamnun Mursalin explained that “the focus here is Digital Bangladesh, widely accepted by Bangladeshi people from all walks of life. Not too many people understood the concept of Digital Bangladesh but they believed it, as something related to information technology. It has been widely accepted by a good number of young voters, believing that the concept of Digital Bangladesh will solve most of our national crisis involving corruption, unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and price hike.” The young voters, comprising one-third of the entire electorate, gave the AL the victory it needed. Mustafa Jabbar, President of Bangladesh Computer Samity, summed up the belief of people in his 2009 book entitled “Digital Bangladesh: ”As the citizen of Bangladesh had to fight against armed forces of Pakistan to achieve a free independent Bangladesh and as they have their rights to live free, independent, developed life. So, it is important to implement Digital Bangladesh program to fulfill the hope and desire of the nation by using digital technologies.”

Slogan Paves Way for Dialogues. With the strong belief in and utter confusion over Digital Bangladesh, various sectors have developed their own interpretations about the buzzword, which they later shared in various conferences and roundtable discussions. Interestingly, the mass media led in organizing these roundtable discussions. From January to September 2009, journalists have brought together stakeholders from different sectors to dialogue on various aspects of Digital Bangladesh. In January 16, 2009, for example, the *Daily Jugantor* organized a discussion to tackle the feasibility of digitization in the country mindful of its poor IT infrastructure. In June 27, 2009, the South Asian Media Net invited government officials, economists and IT experts to look into the concern that Digital Bangladesh may ignore 40 percent of people living below poverty line – thus creating a digital divide between the rich and the poor; the urban and the rural areas. The following month, on July 29, the Financial Express dubbed its roundtable as “Accelerating Digital Bangladesh,” where it put the educational reform needed to actualize Digital Bangladesh on the agenda. It talked about teacher qualifications, access to information and internet connectivity. On August 12, the Bangladesh Observer attempted to put together a “Roadmap on Digital Bangladesh” with key informants from government, IT, academe, business and civil society. It likewise sought to explore targets for 2009-2010 on banking, e-governance, digital technology, education, internet connection, licensed software, tele-health services and rural knowledge centres. The *Daily Star*, on September 9, facilitated a more focused discussion – centering on the country’s mobile phone industry. It assessed that the “mobile industry in Bangladesh, which is still lagging at the bottom rung of tele-density in the region, is at the crossroads of growth where the huge untapped rural market beacons it. But the challenge is strong enough as the cost of owning a mobile set and connection is too prohibitive, making the vision of a Digital Bangladesh a pipe dream.”

In an interview, *Bangladesh Observer* Senior Correspondent Kamal Arsalan explained that journalists believe that they have a “big stake in Digital Bangladesh since it is about the future of the country. For this reason, media does not merely report and interpret events about Digital Bangladesh, it also actively facilitates the dialogues regarding it by organizing roundtable discussions. Media has a natural link with the other sectors

of society and therefore, media is in the best position to conduct these roundtable discussions.” He likewise mentioned that media “does not have a difficult time convincing other sectors to participate in their discussions. All Bangladeshis believe in the vision of Digital Bangladesh and are willing to cooperate to turn the vision into reality. Also, the other sectors benefit by participating in the discussions since their voice will be heard and since they will have exposure in the media. Participants will be known as the country’s opinion leaders.”

Aside from the mass media, other sectors actively facilitated dialogues on Digital Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Congress on ICT for Development conducted on May 23 the Preparatory Committee World Congress on ICT for Development (WCID) 2009. The conference gathered academics, researchers, IT experts, government officials, civil society groups and media personalities to discuss ICT for education, poverty eradication, commerce, disaster prevention, transportation, governance, resource saving, information sharing, gender equality and public health. Think Tank Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), meanwhile, organized “Digital Bangladesh: From Vision to Reality” on June 15, 2009. BEI President Farooq Sobhan pointed out that for a developing country like Bangladesh, it would be a great challenge to give shape to the vision of Digital Bangladesh. For this reason, he has taken a number of initiatives in this area with stakeholders. Participants to the roundtable discussion included ICT experts, telecommunication sector senior management and officials of Ministry of Science and ICT.

In all these forums, various stakeholders have actively engaged in making narratives and exchanging dialogues about Digital Bangladesh. Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, in a keynote address of the Tech Transfer 2000, explained the reasons why the topic is so important to Bangladesh: “IT’s unique contribution comes from one fundamental fact: it is creating a new relationship among people, and between the producer and the consumer. In the economic sphere, this new relationship is leading to significant reduction in cost. Having demonstrated this in unmistakable terms, IT has set the process in motion to dismantle the old economic relationships and the institutions which were based on those relationships.” Hence, Yunus continued that “which among the Third World countries will get ahead and transform its economy dramatically to become a global player will depend on how quickly a country decides to get up and start making arduous efforts to get to the fruit.” Six years later, at the International Telecommunication Union World Information Award Ceremony, Yunus prescribed that ICTs can in three major areas play an immediate role in helping the poor: “ 1) integrating the poor into the mainstream economy by expanding their market, eliminating the middlemen in their business and creating international job opportunities through service outsourcing; 2) bringing information, educational programmes, skills training and healthcare services, etc., all in a very user-friendly way, even to the most remote villages; and 3) empowering the poor, particularly poor women, with a stronger voice that can be heard beyond the borders of their village, better access to information, and improvement in the democratic process.”

As a background, Bangladesh has one of the highest population densities in the world with 140 million people in a total area of 144,000 square kilometers. According to Jabbar (2004), around 40 percent of people live below poverty line, 65 percent are directly involved in agriculture and 85 percent live in rural areas. Life expectancy is 64 years while infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) stands at 54. Taifur (2009) reported during a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) meeting that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate is 6 percent annually while Per Capita Income is US\$695. Literacy is 51.6 percent, teledensity is 34.05 percent, households with electricity are 44.23 percent, households with computer access are 1.36 percent and households with email access are 0.20 percent. Bangladesh has a low e-readiness ranking (142nd in the world) based on the United Nations E-Government Survey 2008. The country remains as one of the poorest in Asia. For these reasons, Bangladeshis are very keen on Digital Bangladesh. The political campaign slogan paved the way to dialogues about the nation’s future.

The Role of Dialogues in Deliberative Democracy. The concept of dialogues has been studied extensively in the field of Communication. Griffin (2006), in his book “A First Look at Communication Theory,” underscored the importance of dialogues in communication. For him, a “dialogue is a constitutive process.” Through dialogues, the social world is constructed including ourselves and our personal relationships. People co-construct their own social realities and are shaped by the world they create. In this sense, dialogues become an essential building block of community since participants achieve a connection with each other. Littlejohn and Foss (2005) added that a “dialogue represents a contextualized, ongoing, and evolving subject matter that contributes to the constant redefinition of the participants in the dialogue as well. The products and potentials of the dialogue are endless; the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken.” Given

this, they continued, the process of dialogue is multiply enriching; it is a process in which each side learns about self and the other. Each participant in dialogues is open to the possibilities that may be suggested by the other, each is enriched by the dialogue, and each is a co-creator of the future that is being created in the interaction, a future that is ever changing as the interaction changes.”

As applied to the on-going dialogue on Digital Bangladesh, various stakeholders in the country are co-creating their future whenever they speak about its vision and roadmap. Participants to the dialogue construct a narrative about their aspired future, share it with other participants and in the end, achieve a connection with them. In many ways, the various stakeholders influence each other. The discussions on Digital Bangladesh look at the nation’s past, assess its present and shape its destiny.

Dahlgren (2002) explained the role of dialogues in more political terms. According to him, “the idea of deliberative democracy builds upon the themes of democracy and citizens’ communicative interaction in public spheres and emphasizes the formation of political will. Deliberative democracy is a process whereby citizens voluntarily and freely participate in discussions on public issues. It is a discursive system where citizens share information about public affairs, talk politics, form opinions, and participate in political processes . . . The whole system is discursive inasmuch as each category of deliberation – sharing information, talking about it, forming opinions, and participating – possesses characteristics of “discourse” and “communicative action.” Dahlgren elaborated that “political discussion is about solving problems, finding solutions to conflicts; it is purposive, goal-oriented. Democratic deliberation is not ‘spontaneous;’ rather it is civil, public, and even necessarily egalitarian. It opens up the door for social discomfort, seemingly the opposite of what is usually intended with conversation.”

In this sense, using Dahlgren’s logic, the dialogues on Digital Bangladesh are healthy for Bangladesh’s democracy. By engaging in conversations, stakeholders maintain a sense of civic identity and generate a collective will. As Dahlgren asserted “citizen engagement is fundamental for democracy, and it begins with talk.” Buber (1923) added that a dialogue approach is highly ethical. He “contrasted two types of relationships – I-It versus I-Thou. In I-It relationships we treat the other person as a thing to be used, an object to be manipulated. Created by monologue, an I-It relationship lacks mutuality. In an I-Thou relationship we regard our partner as the very one we are. We see the other as created in the image of God and resolve to treat him or her as a valued end rather than as a means to our own end.” For Buber, dialogue is a synonym for ethical communication. Dialogue is mutuality in conversation that creates the between, the interhuman, the transaction through which we help each other to be more human.

In light of this, using a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory design, the paper proceeds with a presentation of the narratives on Digital Bangladesh by various stakeholders – government, business, academe, media, IT specialists and civil society. To obtain these narratives, the researchers conducted personal interviews using an interview guide (see Annex A). A total of 11 key informants were interviewed – three from media, three from civil society, two from government, two from IT and one from business (see Annex B). The selection of key informants was purposeful – persons who are either sector opinion leaders; have written books, articles, or columns on Digital Bangladesh; or have participated in roundtable discussions about it. Documents examined included the transcripts of roundtable discussions (see Annex C for list of roundtable discussions), opinion columns (see Annex D) and interview transcripts of sector leaders printed in media (see Annex E).

Being a qualitative study, data have been generated from the personal interviews and from the examination of documents from various sources. Using an analytic induction method, these data were then subjected to a systematic examination of similarities – facilitating a search for broad categories and for the later development of subcategories. The method, hence, allowed for the modification of categories throughout the research process with the goal of most accurately representing social reality. For this study, the broad categories developed were as follows: definitions, goals/objectives, stakeholders/beneficiaries, scope, pillars/components, roadmap, challenges, feasibility and policy recommendations on Digital Bangladesh. From these broad categories, subcategories were developed. The subcategories for pillars/components, for example, included: e-government, e-business, e-agriculture, e-health, ICT infrastructure, cyber security, e-health and the digital divide. The subcategories for stakeholders/beneficiaries consisted of citizens, government, business, media, etc. Data were generated from July to September 2009.

Narratives of Digital Bangladesh. The section starts with the various definitions on Digital Bangladesh. It is followed by other discourses regarding the buzzword – its goals/objectives, stakeholders/beneficiaries, scope, pillars/components, roadmap, challenges, feasibility and policy recommendations. In the pillars/components, the various stakeholders provided an assessment on the present situation of Bangladesh in terms of e-governance, e-business, cyber security, ICT infrastructure, health, education and the digital divide.

As could be gleaned in Matrix 1, the various key informants did not have a shared definition of what Digital Bangladesh is. Key informants from the government, business and IT sectors perceived it from their own perspectives while academe and civil society saw it from the common man’s viewpoint. The media, on the other hand, remained largely confused about the topic. Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) Secretary Enamul Kabir, in an interview, specified that in Digital Bangladesh the “citizens would get information through electronic channels. Human interaction would be minimal. Most of the services can be given over electronic channels.” In this sense, he merely spoke about the provision of government services. Former Secretary of the Ministry of Science and ICT Nazmul Huda Khan defined it as applying “the latest advancements in science and technology” in reaching government development targets such as the “amelioration of life and emancipation from causes vexing humanity.” Gemcon Group Director Kazi Anis Ahmed described it in terms of a more globally competitive Bangladesh in the light of digital capabilities while IT Specialist Shahid Uddin Akbar explained it simply as “integrating ICT in social and economic activities.”

Matrix 1
Definitions of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | Digital Bangladesh is a vision where the citizens of the country can get information through electronic channels. Government services can be provided over electronic channels and the need for human interaction will be minimal. It is to apply the latest advancements of science and technology in the country. |
| Business | A Bangladesh that is globally competitive with the adoption of digital technology that enables a real knowledge economy. |
| Academe | Digital Bangladesh, as people believe, is something that will solve most of the country’s problems such as corruption, unemployment, illiteracy, poverty and inflation. It is a gift of the newly elected government that will come true by 2021. |
| Media | It means that all possible tasks of the government, semi-government and private sector will be processed using technology. It is unclear what the government means by it. However, it seems to be about technology, introducing IT and modernization. It is about being based on digital technology by 2021. |
| IT Specialists | The integration of ICTs in social and economic activities. It calls for a happy, rich, educated, poverty-free and hungry free Bangladesh where people have equal rights. But, this will be driven by digital technology. |
| Civil Society | A vision to bridge the gap between the rich and people, between the urban and the rural. It is a poverty-free Bangladesh where people can exercise their rights, apply knowledge and fulfill desires. |

As expected, key informants from civil society provided more developmental definitions of Digital Bangladesh. A H M Bazlur Rahman, CEO of Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) stated that “I see digital Bangladesh in a way which would bring change in life and livelihood of people in rural areas, income would increase, narrows the gap. All the disparities, divide in terms of technology would be reduced.” Ananya Raihan, Executive Director of Research Group D.Net explained that “Digital Bangladesh (is) an inclusive development agenda of all segments of the society (male, female, marginalized, handicapped, Hindu, Muslim).” With so many definitions and perspectives on the buzzword, New Age Editor Nurul Kabir exclaimed “I have no idea about it. I really do not have any idea what government means by it.”

Notwithstanding these, key informants agreed that Digital Bangladesh had as its goal a brighter future for the country. Even Nurul Kabir admitted that “what is important is to try to introduce different technologies,

modernize by introducing IT.” The key informants enumerated the following aspirations: human rights, legal services, social equity, productivity, law and order, increased income/wealth, economic success, quality education, public health, government transparency, economic empowerment, poverty-free, good governance and zero corruption. The means to these ends was the use of ICTs. Bangladesh Computer Samity President Mustafa Jabbar went further stating that “Digital Bangladesh is a happy, rich, educated/literate, poverty and hunger free Bangladesh, which is a country of citizens with equal rights and these will mostly be driven by digital technology.” From these statements, it appeared that key informants believed that Digital Bangladesh would be a panacea to the country’s ills.

However, Khulna University Professor Bijon B. Sarma cautioned that “digital technology has got both positive and negative effects. We all know what a tremendous blessing the mobile phone has brought for us. Also, we know, miscreants use it for evil purposes. So, if we cannot stop the dark side of its use, this blessing would soon turn to curse. The excellent contribution of internet is known to all. Its free use may help to train our people terrorism (as it happened in the case of USA) and pollute our society with pornography (as has happened in the western countries to a position of no return), none of which are acceptable in Bangladesh for cultural reasons.” He continued that “Digital Bangladesh appeared in one of the poorest countries with over population, draining out of wealth, etc. where the little tax paid by the users and corrupt traders were no match for the huge expenditure on the import of digital equipment.” Hence, while Digital Bangladesh may have ideal objectives, there is a risk that the opposite may happen.

Matrix 2
Goals/Objectives of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | The goals are to ensure human rights, legal services, social equity, productivity, integrity, law and order, etc. for the people through the automation and deployment of ICTs. These are mentioned in the ICT Policy of 2009. |
| Business | The goal is to have a knowledge economy that enables industries to create higher value added wealth. In the process, national income will increase. |
| Academe | The goal is digitization as a pathway to economic success, quality education, public health and government transparency. But, it is both a blessing and a curse. The benefits are known to all. But, it has bad effects on Bangladeshi culture. |
| Media | Its goal is transparency in the government using modern and digital technologies. All citizens will have access to internet and enjoy modern facilities. With this, they will have all the information available to them. |
| IT Specialists | Economic empowerment of the citizen. Bangladesh, as a developed country, will use digital technology, increase equal distribution of opportunity and poverty free. |
| Civil Society | The goal is a poverty-free Bangladesh through the strategic use of ICT, good governance and zero corruption. The goal is to give people the right information at the right time without distortion so that they can make the right decision. |

Regarding stakeholders and benefits, key informants were, more or less, on the same page. They identified the citizens as the main beneficiaries of Digital Bangladesh since, as International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) Bangladesh Representative Zainul Abedin stated “there is a need for getting the right information at the right time and without distortion.” Former Ministry of Science and ICT Secretary Nazmul Huda Khan elaborated that citizens will benefit since Digital Bangladesh has the same goals as the ICT Policy of 2009. As written in the document, the National ICT Policy 2009 envisions “to establish a transparent, accountable and responsible government; to ensure the development of skilled manpower; to increase social justice; to assure public service with less expense, to help transform the country into middle income country by 2021 and to put the country under developed country of the world within 30 years through the expansion and diversified use of ICT.” Given these, key informants mentioned the stakeholders of Digital Bangladesh to include government, business, academe, media and civil society. Other stakeholders mentioned were foreign investors and foreign governments. According to IRRI Bangladesh Representative Abedin, “All Bangladeshis and all outsiders who want to do business with Bangladesh, investors as well. Everyone must have right

information online so that they can do their business properly. They should get the information properly without bribing.”

Matrix 3
Stakeholders/Beneficiaries of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | The beneficiaries should be the public in general. The stakeholders include business, government, employees, farmers, traders, investors, civil society, foreign governments, etc. Everyone who needs timely information. |
| Business | The citizens of Bangladesh. Initially, the education and government sectors will benefit but it will move to other areas of economic activity. |
| Academe | The stakeholders include government bodies, education institutions, ICT work groups and private sector bodies. |
| Media | All citizens of the country. The stakeholders are government bodies, education institutes, ICT work groups, private sector bodies and the general public. |
| IT Specialists | All citizens of the country. But, given the digital divide, there is doubt that Digital Bangladesh will benefit the disadvantaged of the society. |
| Civil Society | The beneficiaries are the people of Bangladesh, particularly farmers, students, unemployed people and marginalized groups. The stakeholders include the government, corporate sector, academia, mass media and civil society organizations. Foreign investors will also benefit as they can get online information. |

Matrix 4
Scope of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | Digital Bangladesh is a philosophy that moves the country towards achieving the technology necessary for a knowledge economy by 2021. The next world will be digitally divided – information rich and information poor. Information is power. |
| Business | Its scope is really a knowledge-based economy where there is full digitization. |
| Academe | It depends. It was a nice sounding political slogan. But then, it became something more serious. It is now about building a knowledge-based economy. |
| Media | It is unclear. There is no roadmap. Many government officials could not even use ICTs. It should be pushing for a knowledge-based economic society. |
| IT Specialists | Connectivity for government and business sectors. It also covers knowledge sharing and process automation. It should be centered around the creation of a “knowledge based” society where ICTs are a critical component. |
| Civil Society | Digital Bangladesh should focus on building a knowledge-based economy where education and ICT will play an important role. Through digital technology, there will be good social, economic and political governance. Society will be prosperous, hunger free and will have law and order. |

Key informants likewise expressed similar answers as to the scope of Digital Bangladesh, which is to build a knowledge-based economy and society. *Amader Shomoy* Editor Nayeemul Islam Khan explained that Digital Bangladesh should “create a knowledge based society. The scope is to create an advanced society which is not a narrow digital one.” BCC Secretary Enamul Kabir elaborated that “the philosophy is to move towards the achieving the technology and be a knowledge economy by 2021. According to the United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry (1998), a knowledge-based economy is “one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the predominant part in the creation of wealth.” During the last few decades, the world economy has been shifting from being driven by industry to being driven by knowledge. The way to prosperity now is through learning and knowledge acquisition. For the key informants, information will play a critical role in determining competitiveness. Hence, Former Secretary Nazmul Huda Khan quoted Former US

Vice President Al Gore, stating that “the next world would be digitally divided, information rich and information poor. Information is considered as power.” Given this situation, he insisted that Bangladesh go digital as soon as possible. “It is the ICT age,” he asserted. “We have already missed the industrial revolution. We have yet to catch up. We should not miss the ICT age.”

Although key informants provided similar answers as to the pillars of Digital Bangladesh, they have varying assessments regarding these. In general, the components included e-governance, e-commerce, education, health, agriculture, media convergence, software/hardware industry, digital divide and cyber security. In e-governance, for example, key informants agreed on its importance but are divided whether it was doable. ULAB Associate Professor Tamnun Mursalin explained that “E-governance is using information technology by the public sector to provide service and information, and encouraging citizens to participate democratically in the decision-making process by making government more transparent and accountable. A good official web portal and information depository needs to be developed to provide citizens with all necessary information from different government ministries. For gaining transparency and reducing corruption, tender bidding, tax filing and plot allotment can be made through this web portal.” American International University Bangladesh (AIUB) Professor Md. Anwarul Kabir elaborated that “e-governance enables the continuous enhancement of the actions of the State, focuses on the efficiency of the internal administration and establishes an Information Management System to arrange internal processes speeding up decision-making at all levels of the government. In a nutshell, e-governance should transform the government into a citizen-centric technological driven one.” *New Age* Editor Nurul Kabir added that “transparency in the public sector is important. Digitization helps transparency.” Be this as it may, some key informants doubted the implementation of e-governance given “analogue politicians.” Former Investment Banker Anam Chowdhury stated that “it is rather difficult to build Digital Bangladesh with analogue politicians and accordingly dropped some of them altogether from important party portfolios . . . Our politicians should understand that the world has changed; the language and the concepts that made sense 20 years ago do not make sense now. We need politicians with skills and expertise to handle the pressing and difficult economic and diplomatic challenges that the country faces today.” *New Age* Editor Nurul Kabir seconded that “Many government ministers and officials do not use ICTs, they do not know how to send an e-mail. It can be a good dream. It can be nothing but rhetoric.” BNNRC’s Bazlur Rahman put it simply: “The psyche of the people is most important. Even when technology is saying ‘yes,’ regulations say ‘no.’”

On e-commerce, key informants once again shared that it is important but current regulations make it difficult to implement. ULAB Associate Professor Tamnun Mursalin suggested that “all types of business including small, medium sized or big should incorporate ICT through e-business or e-commerce. Our products and services should be promoted in the global market with appropriate ICT technology-oriented marketing strategies.” D.Net Executive Director Ananya Raihan expounded that “digital business means general economic activities are re-engineered through integration of ICTs. Businesses irrespective of size can avail ICTs for production and access to market domestically and internationally. Business can transact and make payment online internally and globally.” However, as BIID CEO Shahid Uddin Akbar mentioned “online transaction is not yet possible because of the mindset of the people. If we can easily transact through internet, it will help us in many different ways, will help citizens become more competitive.”

Key informants, on the other hand, were positive regarding education, health and agriculture as pillars of Digital Bangladesh. ULAB Associate Professor Tamnun Mursalin specified that “the education sector must be first targeted. A separate digital network should be built to connect all the educational institutes to share resources, teaching materials and research work. Technologies like digital library, video lecture, multimedia classroom and knowledge-based information repository will improve the employability, literacy and skill of the country.” Business Leader Kazi Anis Ahmed agreed adding that “the population must be educated. Basic computer literacy must be improved and computer programmers must be created. The focus should be at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.” Bangladesh Computer Samity President Mustafa Jabbar went further recommending that “a digital education system with compulsory computer education and having computer as an educational tool will be introduced phase by phase immediately. The usage of computer in education will start from early childhood.”

For the health sector, Associate Professor Tamnun Mursalin, IT Specialist Shahid Uddin Akbar, IRRI Representative Zainul Abedin and Researcher Ananya Raihan indicated that Digital Bangladesh would bring benefits to rural health given the dismal doctor-patient ratio in the countryside. They recommended the use of new technologies for telemedicine, digital record keeping and providing online information on nutrition. In agriculture, Akbar suggested to use IT in fertilizer distribution. Abedin, meanwhile, provided a bigger picture. According to him, “knowledge and technology adaptation of farmers are important because it helps farmers make right decision to improve his life. Actual decision making is a complex thing. IRRI has been trying to improve upon this – trying to improve the contributions of science using ICTs such as making research data available online. It is creating rice knowledge bank globally and country specific knowledge bank like in Bangladesh.”

Unlike education, health and agriculture, some key informants expressed pessimism regarding communication infrastructure and software industry as reliable components of Digital Bangladesh. Freelance Writer Md. Anwarul Kabir reported that the power deficit of the country is now 2000 megawatt daily and ICTs need uninterrupted power supply. “At present, only a few computer network infrastructures have been developed. Internet penetration in the country is only 0.3 percent. The undersea submarine cable faces disruption resulting in slow bandwidth. The Network Readiness Index of Bangladesh is one of the lowest among Asian countries,” he stated. Regarding the software industry, Journalist Kabir, IT Specialist Akbar, Associate Professor Mursalin and IRRI Representative Abedin saw the potential of the country’s IT sector. TIM Nurul Kabir, CEO of Spinnovision, even stated that “it is essential that the software and hardware industry of Bangladesh becomes a part of the global supply chain for ICT products and services, while serving as a platform for enabling the above goals in the digital age. A communication infrastructure that allows ICT-based services to be deployed equitably throughout the nation will make Digital Bangladesh a reality.” However, D.Net Executive Director Raihan has doubts. For him, “there is no scope to develop the software industry in Bangladesh. It has been left behind by other countries. But, the potential is in service industry such as calls centers, outsourcing and medical transcription. For the service sector to succeed, we need to educated people. We can follow the Philippine model. Filipinos are paid higher due to quality education.”

Matrix 5
Pillars/Components of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | E-governance, e-commerce, education, health, media convergence, software/hardware industry, civil society and to a lesser extent on cyber security. |
| Business | E-governance, e-commerce, education, environment, infrastructure development, media convergence, software/hardware industry and civil society. |
| Academe | E-governance, education, e-commerce, legal system, health system and software/hardware industry. |
| Media | E-governance, e-commerce, education, health, digital divide, software industry, access to information, language literacy and cyber security. But, government is not very aware of cyber security. |
| IT Specialists | E-governance, e-commerce, education, health, media, software industry, agriculture, communication infrastructure and civil society. |
| Civil Society | E-governance, e-commerce, education, health, agriculture, cyber security, infrastructure development, media convergence, software/hardware industry, digital divide and an enabling policy environment. |

Key informants regarded addressing the digital divide as high priority and looking into cyber security as second priority. IRRI’s Abedin suggested that “equal opportunity should be provided. Rural people do not get the benefit of modern life. IQ level of city children is better than rural children.” Journalist Nurul Kabir, meanwhile, stated that “80 percent of internet content is in English. Our level of English is poor. Language literacy can reduce the divide.” *Daily Amader Shomoy* Editor Nayeemul Islam Khan, meanwhile, reasoned that “the digital divide is an extension of the divide we have. Society is divided. It is a truth. The promise of digital technology may reduce the gap.” Regarding cyber security, Business Leader Kazi Anis Ahmed mentioned that “this is less priority at the moment. This is for phase two. There should be gold first, then the question of volt comes.” IT Expert Shahid added that “government needs to build its capacity regarding this” while Journalist

Nurul Kabir quipped “security is important at the national, international and personal levels. Government is not very aware of this.”

Regarding the roadmap, most key informants mentioned that at present, there is none for Digital Bangladesh. Journalist Nurul Kabir cynically stated “I have not seen any roadmap at the government level. The present government and the future governments should act seriously as far as ICT is concerned, not for cheap political mileage or keeping it at the rhetorical level.” Hence, most key informants recommended ways on how to create a roadmap such as passing enabling policies, setting goals, formulating national and industry specific strategies, consulting with stakeholders, listing action plans, allocating resources and constructing indicators for monitoring purposes.

Interestingly, however, there are two existing documents that have been recommended as roadmaps for Digital Bangladesh – the National ICT Policy 2009 and the D.Net Formula for Digital Bangladesh. BCC Secretary Enamul Kabir asserted that there is an existing “roadmap. Ministry-based activities and special allocations have been given. Special fund has been given to ICT market promotion. 100 crore taka has been allocated in the budget. The National ICT Policy has 306 action agenda which fall under different Ministries. If they implement these we will have a digital Bangladesh. Workshops are organized by the government at the district level to orient district officials with digital Bangladesh and ICT policy Political leaders are also invited. The 306 action agenda have been split for 48 ministries and divisions. These would be made available for them shortly to carry out respective activities. All these are being coordinated by the PM office. There would be continuous monitoring.” Former Secretary Nazmul Huda Khan, meanwhile, suggested using the D.Net formula to implement Digital Bangladesh – empowering citizens, transforming public services, growing the ICT sector and enabling the market. BNNRC CEO Bazlur Rahman, however, warned that the roadmap of “Digital Bangladesh should not confine its role to ICT only. Strategic use of ICT, decentralized governance, financial corruption and colossal of money and public asset should be reduced – these are the goals and benefits of digital Bangladesh.” In light of this, the two documents have remained unacceptable as roadmaps for Digital Bangladesh.

Matrix 6
Roadmap of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | There is a roadmap. There are ministry-based activities and special budget allocations. A special fund has been given to ICT market promotion. The National ICT Policy has 306 action agendas. If implemented, we will have a Digital Bangladesh. There is a formula suggested by research group D.Net – empowering citizens, transforming public services, growing the ICT sector and enabling the market. |
| Business | The government should pass enabling policies. Once done, the market should take the lead in Digital Bangladesh. |
| Academe | The government has no roadmap and has resulted in confusion. The initial step is developing a roadmap, which includes projects, programs, working methodology and timeline. The government should revive the ICT Task Force, which can initiate the process of making the roadmap. |
| Media | There is no roadmap from the government. They have to take it seriously, not for cheap political mileage or keeping it at the rhetorical level. |
| IT Specialists | ICT Policy 2009 can be the roadmap. The roadmap can also be industry specific such as for tourism and agriculture. |
| Civil Society | There is a need to restructure institutional mechanisms in the country. There is a need to formulate a short, medium and long term plan on how to implement Digital Bangladesh. The government must set goals, formulate strategies, conduct activities, allocate resources, discuss with stakeholders/beneficiaries and establish relationships with them. |

The same went for using budget allocations as indicators of the government’s commitment to Digital Bangladesh. In the budget for fiscal year 2009-10, the government (in its desire to make the vision of digital Bangladesh into reality) increased the allocation for the ICT and telecommunication sector from Taka 265 crore

in 2008-2009 to Taka 563 crore this year. The allocation included Taka 142 crore for Annual Development Programme for science and ICT Ministry; Taka 221 crore for post and telecommunication ministry; a special allocation of Tk 100 crore for ICT development; and 200 crore for equity and entrepreneurship fund for ICT promotion. However, key informants felt that such budget allocations merely exposed the government's position of having ad hoc and fragmented policies, instead of suggesting a clear guideline or comprehensive for digital Bangladesh. Hence, a consensual roadmap on Digital Bangladesh still needed to be formulated.

With regards to the challenges, key informants shared the concern that the country has been lagging behind its neighbors. Habibullah Karim expressed that "in ICT also Bangladesh was an early adopter (as early as 1963) but then it fell behind most countries in the region as evidenced by various indices of ICT readiness such as PC penetration rate, internet penetration rate, and others. In fact, in the latest network readiness index published by the World Economic Forum, Bangladesh ranked behind India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka." However, key informants had different ideas regarding the challenges of Digital Bangladesh. Some problems listed include bureaucratic mindset, lack of political vision, financial problems, low educational level, poor infrastructure, limited resources, illiteracy in English, poverty and not knowing what to do and how to reach Digital Bangladesh.

Matrix 7
Challenges of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | There is a need to change the mindset of the bureaucracy. The second problem is financial. The third problem is education to enable a mass level of participation in the knowledge economy. Other problems are the infrastructure and people's prejudices. |
| Business | The country has limited resources. Other challenges are corruption and the will to actualize Digital Bangladesh. The country's politicians are analogue, not digital. |
| Academe | Good national connectivity. There is need for a sustainable and reliable nationwide network infrastructure. There should be decentralization and digital government services to be provided for all citizens. It can only be done if the country has vast money. The government has embarked on something extremely risky. |
| Media | The main challenges are the government's political vision and the attitude of political parties. Other challenges are lack of education, lack of IT facilities, use of English language and poverty. |
| IT Specialists | Political commitment. E-readiness of the country in terms of infrastructure, governance and education. |
| Civil Society | There is need for a big amount of investment for Digital Bangladesh. There might be a lack of willingness to change institutional mechanisms. There is a lack of coordination between institutions. Also, the attitudes and mindsets of the major stakeholders must be on the same page. The greatest challenge is knowing what to do and how to do it. |

Khulna University Professor Bijon Sarma, however, presented one interesting narrative regarding the challenge of Digital Bangladesh. For him, the current government engaged in an extremely risky game. Digital Bangladesh expanded into scope from being "a nice sounding political slogan" to becoming a moral duty of the AL party. He continued: "For Awami League and the government of Bangladesh creation of Digital Bangladesh has turned to something like 'mission with no return' because of the reasons like: (i) This is one of their most important election manifestoes; (ii) The opposition political party is vigilant and they would consider the failure of this program as their grand success; (iii) The foreign manufacturers and their local agents would keep on pressing because they have good fortunes in it; and (iv) The local providers (including companies like some extremely corrupt mobile companies) would encourage it for obvious reasons." Hence, the challenges were not just for the success of Digital Bangladesh but also for the AL government.

Key informants were conditionally optimistic regarding the feasibility of Digital Bangladesh. They believed that the vision can become successful given the following: economic prosperity, strong and hardworking leadership, enabling policy environment, installation of proper administrative structure and coordination, support from private sector and creation of a realistic roadmap. Civil Society Informants like Ananya Raihan, Bazlur Rahman and Zainul Abedin cautioned that Digital Bangladesh should not only focus on

ICTs but on holistic human development. They likewise mentioned the need to create short term, medium term and long term plans. D.Net Executive Director Raihan even gave indicators to measure the implementation of Digital Bangladesh. According to him, one objective is poverty reduction. At present, 60 million people live below poverty line and the goal is to reduce it to 30 million. This is possible. But, government should think out of the box. Business as usual will not work.”

Another shared narrative among key informants was the need for all Bangladeshis to work together to make Digital Bangladesh a reality. After all, Digital Bangladesh has become the dream of the nation. People believe in it. Therefore, people should work hard to make it come true.

Matrix 8
Feasibility of Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | It is feasible with some “ifs” and “buts.” The economy must prosper and purchasing power must remain under control. There must also be proper leadership. |
| Business | It is feasible if the government makes proper policies and the private sector moves this forward. The government should set up a commission for this purpose and formulate a more detailed plan. |
| Academe | It is feasible but the government must work hard in the next five years. |
| Media | If we all work together, it will be feasible. But, there should be no timeframe. It depends on how the government takes it and how the digital divide is addressed. |
| IT Specialists | It is feasible. But, the right people need to be assigned and they need to be well coordinated. There is need for a realistic action plan. There should be an internal mechanism like an IMED (Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division). There is need for a well integrated administrative structure. |
| Civil Society | It is feasible if the proper institutional reforms are done. A poverty free Bangladesh can be measurable. Now, 60 million people are in poverty and the goal is to reduce this to 30 million until the country is poverty-free. If the program will focus only on technology, this will not be achievable. |

Matrix 9
Policy Recommendations on Digital Bangladesh

| Sector | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Government | Privatization is needed. There should not be any increased government interference. Also, the Bengali language should be utilized in ICTs. |
| Business | Government should create policies to ensure computer literacy. Government must ensure quality education. |
| Academe | There is need for a more adaptable and applicable ICT policy. |
| Media | Government personnel must be required to use ICT in their official works. They must know how to email. ICT education should be provided at the school level. This way, the entire new generation will have ICT exposure. |
| IT Specialists | Policies are not that important if they are not implemented. Digital Bangladesh will only become a reality only through joint efforts of all sectors. Policies must ensure the closing of the digital divide. |
| Civil Society | The poor must benefit more from Digital Bangladesh than the rich. The price of mobile phones must be reduced to benefit the poor. There should be policies for specific sectors like agriculture. For example, there is need for strong web presence in the agriculture sector. |

As for policy recommendations relating to Digital Bangladesh, key informants recommended government policies on: privatization, use of Bengali language in ICT, increased computer literacy, better quality of education, reducing the digital divide, web presence in agriculture sector, decreased taxes for mobile phones and a more responsive ICT policy. IT Specialist Mustafa Jabbar summed this stating that “all anti-

people, undemocratic and communal clauses will be removed from the constitution. Freedom of judiciary, election commission and media in real sense will be ensured. Political parties and their working methodologies will be democratic and transparent.”

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations. In summary, the study looked into the narratives and ensuing dialogues on Digital Bangladesh from the perspective of government, business, academe, media, IT and civil society. From the findings, it can be gleaned that Bangladeshis from these various sectors felt they had a huge stake in Digital Bangladesh and for this reason, did not allow the campaign slogan to die a natural death. Instead, they have developed their own narratives about it and from these narratives, dialogues ensued – facilitated mainly by the media and academe. In these narratives and dialogues, the study found that the sectors’ leaders had diverging assessments on the state of e-governance, e-commerce and software/hardware industry but were more in agreement with health, education, agriculture, digital divide and cyber security. They likewise had shared meanings regarding the stakeholders/beneficiaries, pillars/components and scope of Digital Bangladesh but were divided regarding its definition, goals and roadmap. They presented a myriad of challenges and policy recommendations for Digital Bangladesh as well. The bottom line, however, was that the different sectors wanted to be involved in making Digital Bangladesh a reality through a comprehensive Master Plan (roadmap). D.net Executive Director Ananya Raihan expressed that the “Master Plan can be developed for a 12-year period (2010-2021). The Master Plan can be developed on the basis of existing works done by the ICT stakeholders in the country. The revised ICT Policy of 2008 can be a very good basis for the development of the Master Plan. Huge energy was given by stakeholders from all four segments of the Digital Bangladesh concept.”

In light of these, this paper recommends to the government that a dialogue approach be utilized in creating a comprehensive Master Plan on Digital Bangladesh. In so doing, it asks the government to depart from its past approaches in ICT development – instead of relying mainly on itself, the Bangladeshi government should allow the participation of other stakeholders and also, rather than focusing on ICT Development alone, the government can think in terms of ICT and Development. As a background, the country has been into ICT since the 1960s. When the Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) was established in 1986, ICT usage increased drastically especially in the government sector. In 1997, the government formed a National ICT Task Force under the Prime Minister’s Office to mainstream ICT in the public sector. In 2001, the Support to the ICT Task Force, which consisted of 19 government bodies with the Prime Minister as convener and the Planning Division (under the Ministry of Finance and Planning) as member secretary, was formed to identify/implement e-government projects. The government created a National ICT Policy in 2002 to guide its growth and development. The government, however, has failed to deliver on its ICT targets – leading it to update the document in 2008 to include inputs from other stakeholders. Computer Software Company Spinnovation Owner TIM Nurul Kabir, in an opinion column, clarified that the “lack of progress cannot be explained by a lack of focus or political priority” but “much of the strategic work by the government takes a broad and ambitious approach to the scope of ICT policy change. This makes the government to try to do everything at once and therefore, under-deliver. . . . The final weakness is implementation approach, which has been focused on government delivery rather than facilitation and enabling of private and voluntary sector solutions.”

The study’s key informant from the business sector has likewise expressed a similar point. Kazi Anis Ahmed mentioned that the success of Digital Bangladesh “depends on the enabling policies made by the government. The market should lead once policies are made.” However, in creating such enabling environments, civil society key informant Zainul Abedin underscored that government “should always discuss with beneficiaries and stakeholders. Government must establish partnerships with them. Everyone should share in the responsibility and the ethics.” In light of these discussions and of the study’s findings, the paper recommends directions to the government regarding its dialogue with stakeholders in terms of its initiator, participants, process and content.

In initiating the dialogue, the government may find it best to form a special body given that ICT and Development cuts across government bodies. There have been two suggestions forwarded regarding this – the first was to reactivate the National ICT Task Force and the second is to create a Digital Bangladesh Secretariat under the said Task Force. In its election manifesto, the Awami League blamed the opposition party for the demise of the National ICT Task Force, which it promised to reactivate once elected. TIM Nurul Kabir, however, expressed that the task force proved ineffective given that “there are unclear and uncoordinated

governance structures and processes. There are many bodies involved in ICT governance, which creates confusion about where accountability lies. As ICT is a cross-cutting area, it involves more than one agency for implementation. For this reason, a task force was established but it did not operate effectively. Relations between the task force and the Ministry of Science and ICT were unclear; the key staff involved in supporting the task force had other priorities which conflicted with this role; and the task force has met very infrequently.”

For similar reasons, D.net Executive Director Ananya Raihan suggested the creation of a Digital Bangladesh Secretariat as the executive wing of the National ICT Task Force. According to him, “for undertaking a comprehensive plan and ensuring its smooth implementation, an executive wing of the Task Force can be created. The secretariat will have four distinctive wings in line with the conceptualization of Digital Bangladesh.” These four wings will include digital government, digital education, digital business and digital citizen. The study, however, contends that the government may find it best to form a more encompassing body to create the Master Plan on Digital Bangladesh in terms of representation and content. The body may include representatives from all stakeholder groups (not just government) to facilitate the dialogue process and ensure broad ownership of the dialogue results. Likewise, the body may expand the scope of discussions to include both ICT and development. In the suggestions presented earlier, the National Task Force on ICT simply had government representatives, sector consultation and ICT focus. The government may revive and improve on the National Task Force on ICT as well as create a Digital Bangladesh Secretariat under it. Moreover, the said Secretariat may have representatives from various stakeholder groups. The study recommends such body to be the initiator of the dialogue.

As to the participants of the dialogue, the government may find it prudent to include the various stakeholders and beneficiaries of Digital Bangladesh – government bodies, civil society, business, academe, media and IT. However, it should give special attention to explaining Digital Bangladesh to women, rural folk and other marginalized sectors (who the survey illustrated were most confused about it) and to the youth and educated sectors (who voted for them given their platform on it). The government may see the need to involve the opposition parties in creating Digital Bangladesh. As observed by one academic, the opposition may relish in the failure of this vision. Moreover, the government may wish to involve foreign investors in the dialogue in terms of their information needs, which can be provided for by Digital Bangladesh.

In terms of the dialogue’s process, the government may seek to conduct first intra-sector dialogues and second inter-sector dialogues. The study’s findings illustrated that government officials did not have a common stand regarding Digital Bangladesh – definition, challenges and road map. Some government representatives merely saw Digital Bangladesh as ICT development while another underscored the need for citizen empowerment. Other government officials sought to deal with the vision in terms of budget allocations while others felt the need to bridge the digital divide. For the government, the proposed Secretariat on Digital Bangladesh (under the National Task Force on ICT) may suffice. For the other sectors, leading organizations may be identified. In the IT sector, for example, the Bangladesh Association for Software and Information Services (BASIS) and Bangladesh Computer Samity may be the lead conveners. For civil society, some institutions in the area of ICT for poverty alleviation are Development Research Network (D.Net), Grameen Phone and BRACNET.NET. Once dialogues within a sector (such as government) have been conducted, conversations with other sectors may be arranged. In so doing, the government may do well in appreciating the role of the media in facilitating such dialogues on Digital Bangladesh. The mass media has proven instrumental not only in transmitting information but also in forming consensus on it.

Finally, on the content of the dialogue, the government may find it wise to continue with the current dialogue topics on Digital Bangladesh. It should persist in areas where no consensus has been formed – definition, goal, policy, challenges and roadmap. It may likewise capitalize on existing shared meanings about it, particularly regarding its beneficiaries/stakeholders, scope, pillars/components and feasibility. The government may find it wise to adopt a holistic development view of Digital Bangladesh, not an ICT focused one. This way, it will ensure the continued support of more stakeholders, particularly academe and civil society.

After these dialogues, the Digital Bangladesh Secretariat may find that it wise to utilize the shared meanings and concerns in formulating a comprehensive Master Plan. This way, it would produce a plan that would be owned and implemented by the various beneficiaries and stakeholders. Such being the case, there is greater likelihood regarding its success as Digital Bangladesh becomes an undertaking of the government

and other societal sectors. Indeed, Bangladeshis are now in dialogue because the dialogue is about their common future.

References:

- Abubakar, S, F, I, (2009, April) Perspective Digital Bangladesh: Need of Time, Retrieved June 12, 2009, from <http://www.sufi-faruq.com/news-a-events/26-ict/150-seminar-on-perspective-digital-bangladesh-need-of-time>
- Akbar, M. S. U, (2009, October 31), Digital Bangladesh: Integrating ICT in non-ICT projects, *The Daily Star*, p 11.
- Bangladesh Awami League, (2008, December 17). Vote for Boat for digital Bangladesh: Sheikh Hasina tells rallies en route to Tungipara. Retrieved August 25, 2009, from http://www.albd.org/autoalbd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=377&Itemid=1
- Bangladesh Enterprise Institute* (2009, June 15). Round table meeting on Digital Bangladesh: From Vision to Reality.
- Correspondent, Staff, (2009, June 22). Cross digital divide to reach digital Bangladesh *The Daily Star*, p.1.
- Chowdhury, A. A. (2009, August 21). Digital Bangladesh with analogue politicians? *The Daily Star*, p 10.
- Chowdhury, M. (2009, February 2). Digital Bangladesh: Going Beyond the Rhetoric, Forum, *The Daily Star*, Vol 3, Issue 2, p. 12.
- Chowdhury, M. (2009, June, 30). A reflection of unpreparedness? *The Daily Star*, p. 11.
- Dahigren, P. (2002). *In Search of the Talkative Public: Media, Deliberative Democracy and Civic Culture*. Paper presented at the Political Communication Session, IAMCR.
- Doza, B. (2009). Bangladesh Budget 2009-2010 and Digital Bangladesh. Retrieved 15 August 2009, from <http://bdoza.wordpress.com/2009/06/23/towards-digital-Bangladesh-as-planned-in-bagladesh-budget-2009-10/>
- Election Manifesto of Bangladesh Awami League 2008. Retrieved June 22, 2009, from http://www.albd.org/autoalbd/content/view/367/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=367&Itemid=1
- Gayen, S. K. (2009, September 6). Going Digital, *The Daily Star*, p 11.
- Griffin, E. (2006). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. Singapore: McGrawHill.
- Hussain, D. (2009, May 8). Digital Bangladesh: Virtual dreams, real lives. Retrieved 14 August 2009, from <http://southasia.oneworld.net/opinioncomment/digital-bangladesh-virtual-dreams-real-lives>
- Jabbar, M. (2009). *Digital Bangladesh* Dhaka: Ananda Computers.
- Jabbar, M. (2004). *Cyber Communities in Rural Asia: Bangladesh*. Karan K (editor). Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International.
- Kabir, M. A. (2009, February 22). Dream of a digital Bangladesh, Star Campus, *The Daily Star*, Vol 3, Issue 25, p. 6.
- Kabir, M. A. (2009, January 30). Promised digital Bangladesh and the young generation. Retrieved 20 August 2009, from <http://mukto-mona.com/wordpress/?p=103>.
- Kabir, T. I. M. N. (2008, September 18). ICT in Bangladesh: The time is now. *The Daily Star*, p. 11.
- Kabir, T. I. M. N. (2009, April 17). Making digital Bangladesh: No time to waste. Retrieved 20 August, 2009, from <http://www.technetbangladesh.com/2009/04/making-digital-bangladesh-no-time-to-waste/>
- Karim, R. (2009, February 22). Digital Bangladesh: What Might Lie Ahead, Star Campus, *The Daily Star*, Vol 2, Issue 107, p. 13.. Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2005). *Theories of Human Communication*. Canada: Wadsworth.
- Mursalin, T. E. (2009, February 8). Towards Vision 2021 of a Digital Bangladesh. *The Financial Express*, p. 12.
- Murshed, G. (2009), Designing a roadmap: Making Bangladesh digitized. *The Daily Independent*
- National ICT Policy (Approved)*, (2009). Retrieved July, 2009, from <http://www.bcc.net.bd/ICT-Policy/ICT%20Booklet.pdf>.
- Raihan, A., & Habib, S. M. A. (2006). *Digital Review of Bangladesh: A Preliminary Exploration* Dhaka: D.Net (Development Research Network).
- Sharma, B. B. (2009, June 7). Thoughts on Digital Bangladesh. Retrieved 15 August, 2009, from <http://www.bdresearchers.org/Article/%20Digital%20Bangladesh01>
- Shuvra, S. K. K. (2009, January 16). Digital Bangladesh: Possibility and Reality. Retrieved 22 August 2009, from <http://priyo.com/tech/2009/01/16/19084.html>

Siddiqi, H. (2009, March 15). Managing Digital Bangladesh 2021. *The Daily Star*, p. 11.

South Asian Media Net (2009, June 27), Digital approach feared to ignore poor. Retrieved August 14, 2009, from <http://www.southasianmedia.net/cnn.cfm?id=590057&category=Science&Technology&Country=BANGLADESH>

Taufur, S. A. S. M. (2009). Situation of Information Society in Bangladesh. Bangkok: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Yunus, M. (2006, May 17). Statement by Professor Muhammad Yunus. Retrieved 14 August 2009, from <http://www.itu.int/wisd/2006/award/statements/yunus.html>

Annex A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Narratives on Digital Bangladesh: Shared Meanings, Shared Concerns

Key Informant: _____
 Position: _____
 Organization: _____

Interview Date/Time: _____
 Interview Place: _____
 Interviewer: _____

1. What is “Digital Bangladesh?” How would you define/describe it?
2. What are the goals/benefits of “Digital Bangladesh?”
3. Who are the stakeholders/beneficiaries of Digital Bangladesh?
4. What is the scope of “Digital Bangladesh?” Will it focus on digitization? Will it push for a knowledge-based economy/society? Why or why not?
5. What are the pillars/aspects/components of “Digital Bangladesh?” Kindly identify and explain each.
6. Should Digital Bangladesh encompass the following pillars/components? Why or why not?
 - E-governance/Government Sector
 - E-commerce/Business Sector
 - Education Sector
 - Health/Environment Sectors
 - Cyber Security
 - Media Convergence/ Communication Sector
 - Software and Hardware Industry/ IT Sector
 - Digital Divide/Civil Society Sector
 - Others, please specify
7. What is, in your opinion, the roadmap for “Digital Bangladesh?” How would it become a reality?
8. What are, in your opinion, the challenges in making the vision of “Digital Bangladesh” into a reality?
9. In your opinion, do you think that the vision of “Digital Bangladesh” is feasible? Why or why not?
10. What recommendations, in line with Digital Bangladesh, do you have in mind regarding government policy on ICT?

Annex B: List of Interviewees by the Authors

Media Informants

Interviewee: Mr. Nayeemul Islam Khan
Position: Editor
Organization: The Daily Amader Shomoy
Interview Date/Time: September 5, 2009, 3 pm
Interview Place: The Daily Amader Shomoy Office, Dhaka.
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Interviewee: Mr. Nurul Kabir
Position: Editor
Organization: The New Age
Interview Date/Time: September 4, 2009, 6 pm.
Interview Place: Holiday Building , Dhaka.
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Interviewee: Kamal Arsalan
Position: Senior Correspondent
Organization: The Bangladesh Observer
Interview Date/Time: October 15, 2009, 10:30 a.m.
Interview Place: Through Email
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam/Jude Genilo

Civil Society Informants

Interviewee: Dr. Ananya Raihan
Position: Executive Director
Organization: Development Research Network (D. Net)
Interview Date/Time: August 13, 2009, 2 pm.
Interview Place: D. Net Office, Dhaka.
Interviewer: Dr. Jude Genilo and Marium Akther

Interviewee: Mr. A H M Bazlur Rahman
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Organization: Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)
Interview Date/Time: September 7, 2009, 9 am.
Interview Place: BNNRC Office, Dhaka.
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Interviewee: Dr. Zainul Abedin
Position: IRRI Representative of Bangladesh
Organization: International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)
Interview Date/Time: August 20, 2009, 9 am.
Interview Place: International Rice Research Institute, Dhaka
Interviewer: Dr. Jude Genilo and Shamsul Islam

Government Informants

Interviewee: Mr. Nazmul Huda Khan
Position: Former Secretary
Organization: Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology

Interview Date/Time: September 9, 2009, 1 pm.
Interview Place: Eskaton Garden, Dhaka.
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Interviewee: Mr. Enamul Kabir
Position: Secretary
Organization: Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC)
Interview Date/Time: September 4, 2009, 9 pm.
Interview Place: Mohammadpur, Dhaka
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

IT Sector Informants

Interviewee: Mr. Shahid Uddin Akbar
Position: Chief Executive Officer
Organization: Bangladesh Institute of ICT for Development (BIID)
Interview Date/Time: August 19, 2009, 2.30 pm
Interview Place: University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Dhaka
Interviewer: Dr. Jude Genilo and Marium Akther

Interviewee: Md. Kawser Uddin
Position: President
Organization: Bangladesh ICT Journalist Forum
Interview Date/Time: September 6, 2009, 2.30 pm.
Interview Place: Online
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Business Sector Informant

Interviewee: Dr. Kazi Anis Ahmed
Position: Director and Chief Strategy Officer
Organization: Gemcon Group
Interview Date/Time: September 2, 2009, 4 pm
Interview Place: University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Dhaka
Interviewer: Md. Shamsul Islam

Annex C: List of Round Table Discussions Organized by Media and Other Organizations

Title: Digital Bangladesh: Possibility and Reality
Date: January 16, 2009
Organizer: The Daily Jugantor.

Title: The Role of the proposed budget in building a digital Bangladesh
Date: June 27, 2009
Organizer: South Asian Media Net

Title: Accelerating Digital Bangladesh
Date: July 29, 2009
Organizer: The Financial Express

Title: Road Map for Digital Bangladesh
Date: August 12, 2009
Organizer: Hotel Sheraton/The Bangladesh Observer

Title: Round table on Digital Bangladesh “Cross digital divide to reach digital Bangladesh”
Date: September 9, 2009
Organizer: The Daily Star

Title: Digital Bangladesh: From Vision to Reality
Date: June 15, 2009
Organizer: Bangladesh Enterprise Institute

Annex D: List of Opinion Columns/ Columns Examined

1. Digital Bangladesh with analogue politicians? The Daily Star, August 21, 2009.
2. Designing a roadmap, Making Bangladesh digitized, Ghulam Murshed. Accessed at : [http:// www.the independent –bd.com/printversion.php?nid=1186](http://www.the-independent-bd.com/printversion.php?nid=1186)
3. ICT in Bangladesh: The time is now. The Daily Star, September 18, 2009.
4. Towards vision 2021 of a Digital Bangladesh by Tamnun Mursalin , Assistant Professor, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Accessed at <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/02/08/58247.html>
5. Thoughts on Digital Bangladesh by Prof. Bijon B Sharma. Accessed at www.bdresearchers.org/Article/DigitalBangladesh01
6. Promosed digital Bangladesh and the young generation by Md. Anwarul Kabir. Accessed at <http://mukto-mona.com/wordpress/?p=103>
7. Dream of a Digital Bangladesh by Prof. Md. Anwarul Kabir. Star Campus, Volume 2, Issue107, February 22, 2009
8. Going Digital by Swapan Kumar Gayen. The Daily Star, September 6, 2009.
9. Managing Digital Bangladesh by Hafiz Siddiqi. The Daily Star March 15, 2009.
10. Digital Bangladesh and the Young by Md. Anwarul Kabir. The Daily Star, February 2 2009.
11. Digital Bangladesh: Virtual dreams, real lives, Delwar Hossain.
<http://southasia.oneworld.net/opinioncomment/digital-bangladesh-virtual-.....>

Annex E: Interview Conducted by and Printed in the Media

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Key Informant: | Mr. Mustafa Jabbar |
| Position: | BCS, President and Ananda Computers,CEO |
| Organization: | Bangladesh Computer Samity, and Ananda Computers |
| Interview Date: | February 22, 2009 |
| Interview Place: | Star Campus, the Daily Star |
| Interviewer: | Mr. Mahdin Mahboob |