EVENT
READBACK

Virtual Session 2
Community of Practice: ID
26th October 2023

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Index

About The Event

As part of the Community of Practice: ID Initiative (COP), a **second virtual event** was hosted that invited various community-based entities and researchers to participate around the topics of digital ID and gender inclusion. The participants joined from various locations in **Ethiopia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and India**.

The 2nd virtual session of the COP was hosted on the **26th of October, 2023 via Zoom**.

India: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM
Sri Lanka: 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM
Ethiopia: 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Philippines: 3:00 PM - 4:30PM

The recording of the session will be made available for viewing on:
https://inclusion.aapti.in/

For queries and collaboration opportunities, please email kunal@aapti.in.

Attendees for the 2nd Virtual COP Event

Attendees from the Initial Steering Committee (ISC):
Members of ISC facilitate the COP.
- Mr. Kunal Raj Barua (Aapti)
- Ms. Mousmi Panda (Aapti)
- Mr. Shiv Chhatrala (Aapti)
- Ms. Swarathmika Kumar (MOSIP)
- Mr. Arun Gurumurthy (Advisor) (MOSIP)

Participants for the Second Virtual Session of the COP: ID
- Professor Janaki Srinivasan - Keynote Speaker (International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore)
- Dr. Tessema Bekele (Emmanuel Development Association)
- Ms. Nafkot Getinet Alemaw (Ace Advisors)
- Mr. Edris Yesuf (F.D.R.E Authority for Civil Society Organizations)
- Ms. Neo Brown (Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations Council)
- Ms. Gabriella Abraham (National ID Program)
- Ms. Feven Bulbula (National ID Program)
- Mr. Issac Bezabih (Digital Opportunity Trust Ethiopia)
- Mr. Gelalcha (Siiqqee Women's Development Association)
- Mr. Elmer Soriano (Civika Asian Development Academy)
- Ms. Nessri (Ethiopian Women Empowerment Association)
- Ms. Niharika Betkerur (MOSIP)
- Mr. Ritvik Gupta (Aapti)

We thank all the participants for joining the second virtual meeting of the COP. For the interested entities that were unable to attend, your presence was truly missed, and we hope that you can join us for future virtual meetings. We hope that this note concisely encapsulates the second virtual meet and the sessions within.

Executive Summary

The second virtual event of the Community of Practice (COP) centred on gender inclusion and understanding women's experiences with digital ID systems. The event highlighted valuable insights into women's engagement with digital identity systems and the broader digital ecosystem.

The Knowledge Session (KS), led by Professor Janaki Srinivasan, emphasised the need for digital IDs in accessing state services and the roles of stakeholders in the digital ID ecosystem. The Participatory Session (PS) unpacked the **Awareness, Access, and Usage (A2U)** framework and explored issues like **information asymmetry, accessibility constraints, and socio-normative influences** on women's interactions with digital IDs. This session also engaged with the participants of the COP to hear about emerging challenges and practices that hope to address these challenges.

Event Agenda

The second virtual event of the COP started with the summarisation of the first event that can be found here. It was followed by a knowledge session on the theme **"understanding interaction and challenges when engaging with identity systems through lived experiences".** The event closed with a participatory session with the COP participants.

The purpose of this readback

This event readback encapsulates the insights, learnings, and discussions from the second virtual COP event. It covers the key takeaways discussed by Professor Janaki Srinivasan from the KS. Further, this document also summarises and highlights key insights that were discussed when understanding the challenges faced by the participating entities in the PS.

Context of the event

Research and ecosystem interactions highlight that marginalised groups continue to face challenges when interacting with digital systems and when accessing state services. With the continued adoption of digital technologies to catalyse essential service provision, understanding the challenges faced by women specifically is key when ideating and designing critical infrastructure.

While the narrative to include women and improve participation has strengthened, efforts remain siloed and fragmented. Research on building gender inclusive systems that unlock and provide opportunities continues to shed light on such issues but is often tough to discover. Initiatives and research that highlight efforts, understand the nuances, and identify existing and new challenges are crucial for implementers, technology developers, and other key ecosystem actors to strengthen system design.

In this context, the COP convenes key actors such as researchers, community-based entities, and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen the evidence-based research that is needed for the ecosystem. The second event focussed on understanding women's engagement with identity structures, digital identity systems, the digital ecosystem, and their communities. **The objective of the event was to facilitate meaningful discussions, understand said challenges and identify on ground efforts that address some of these challenges.**

Knowledge Session

The COP invited **Professor Janaki Srinivasan** to be the keynote speaker for the event. Professor Srinivasan is a faculty member at The International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore (IIIT-B) and has worked on various themes pertaining to the usage of [digital technologies and its impact on various communities](#). This session revolved around the following topics:

1. Need for ID and its role in accessing the state services
2. Getting the ID and using it
3. Role of stakeholders in the digital ID ecosystem

The need for ID and its role in accessing state services

When discussing ID systems, Professor Srinivasan referred to her work on how government service centres facilitate digital interactions and the challenges faced due to infrastructural constraints. She shared that historically there's been an over- dependence on government service centres to obtain information or access state services. With a surge in internet connectivity, individuals now rely on using personal digital devices to access various services.

Professor Janaki also highlighted the shift from using tangible identity artefacts for authentication to digitalised IDs. While the format of ID credentials might have changed, its requirement to access state services has stayed constant – which highlighted that the need for a legal ID predates the concept of digital IDs.

Professor Srinivasan highlighted that a major reason for digitising IDs was to make them more accessible, however noted that this may not always be the case. Incidentally, her work at the [Identities Project](#) revealed that groups who are more likely to access state services often lack the documentation required to prove their eligibility.

While highlighting the need for an effective mechanism to access essential state services, Professor Srinivasan highlighted that the agency over such decisions should remain with individuals, and that the discretion of obtaining a legal identity should be when individuals chose to be formally recognised by the state.

From obtaining ID, to using it

While discussing the potential challenges that marginalised communities face, Professor Srinivasan mentioned that despite wanting to obtain a legal identity, individuals remain unaware of the various points in the process. Additionally, she also mentioned that individuals often consciously decide to abstain from obtaining IDs due to a variety of personal reasons.

Professor Srinivasan also highlighted three key phases to illustrate the journey from deciding to get an ID to leveraging it.

Phase 1: An individual's decision to get an ID
- **Availing state services can trigger the need to get an ID**
  - With state services relying on using specific forms of identification for authentication, people are often driven to obtain state provided ID documents to avail these services.

- **Collective community perception may influence the need to get an ID**
  - The perceptions of various rural communities are often influenced by singular sources. This often triggers uniformity in information and perception. Professor Srinivasan also mentioned that this experience might differ in urban settings where information can be collected from various sources.

Phase 2: Enrolment
- **The role of families can differ depending on the context**
  - Families often play a dual role during a woman's journey of accessing IDs. In specific contexts, families could often discourage women from accessing this system due to a variety of socio-normative dynamics. Alternatively, families often facilitate and support the enrolment process through resources and time.

- **Societal practices and individual preferences determine their willingness to enrol**
  - People's preferences for data and information sharing are highly nuanced and context dependent. While privacy is a concern for women, specific societal practices also play a role in encouraging or discouraging women. Professor Srinivasan shared an observation from her work mentioning that a woman from Rajasthan (India) might not show her face when wearing a 'saree', primarily due to cultural practices.

Phase 3: Leveraging the ID
- **Information asymmetry for multiple IDs often hinders its effective use when accessing state services**
  - State services often use multiple or specific identity documents for authentication. In various cases, Professor Srinivasan indicated that individuals might not possess multiple IDs, the required ID, or might be unaware of which ID document to use. This acts as a barrier in accessing essential services and schemes.

Role of intermediaries in digital ID ecosystem

Digital systems or state provided services often see the presence of various stakeholders between the individual and the service provider. These stakeholders, sometimes known as intermediaries often play differing roles. Professor Srinivasan emphasised the importance of recognizing these intermediaries within the ID ecosystem. As a crucial part of the system, intermediaries act as a facilitator for local communities, are often the first point of contact for such systems and are crucial in building trust. Intermediaries can be formal and informal in nature, depending on whether they have been recognised by relevant authorities, incorporated into the formal system, or provided resources for their operations.

Professor Srinivasan further stated that after recognising the role and purpose of such intermediaries, it becomes crucial for these systems to provide resources and ensure accountability to these intermediaries through incentives and accountability mechanisms.

"IDs are static objects, dealing with people's dynamic lives."
- Professor Srinivasan

Participatory Session
Understanding Experiences and Interactions

During this session, participants shared their experiences on various aspects of the Awareness, Access, and Usage (A2U) framework. This framework aims to understand gender inclusivity in digital identity systems and the larger digital ecosystem by analysing three main categories: **a) Awareness, b) Access, and c) Usage**. The framework also helps understand the nuanced challenges faced by women while interacting with digital systems. Interactions were anchored on the key challenges during the session, where participants were requested to share their own learnings and potential best practices, that they might be implementing to address these challenges.

Awareness challenges

- **Digital literacy varies between men and women and can often inhibit interactions with digital ID systems**
  - Dr. Tessema stated that in their interactions with rural communities, they observed a digital literacy gap among men and women which impacted the way women acquired information about digital IDs.

- **Pre-existing IDs reduce people's willingness to learn about digital IDs**
  - Mr. Gelalcha stated that rural communities in Ethiopia are often indifferent about learning about a digital ID as they already have one pre-existing form of identification. However, this experience differs in urban settings making this dependent on geography and context.

- **Lack of information on the purpose of "digital IDs" hinders people's willingness to learn about them**
  - People are often reluctant to learn more about digital IDs as they are unable to determine its purpose. Mr. Gelalcha mentioned, rural communities in Ethiopia may have limited awareness of passports (a form of digital ID in Ethiopia) as they have no intention of travelling abroad.

Accessibility challenges

- **There are several logistical and resource constraints that impede the access to identity for marginal communities**
  - Ms. Nessri highlighted that vulnerable communities often lack the financial and digital resources to access digital ID.
  - Ms. Feven stated that vulnerable communities often lack the verifiable information required to enrol citizens.
  - Technological underrepresentation among women hinders adoption of digital IDs. For eg. The NIDP is facing significant

challenges as many women in rural areas have no access to mobile phones and internet connectivity.

- **Various normative constraints and lack of agency prevent women from accessing digital IDs**
  - Ms. Gabriella stated that there is a 20% gender gap in the ID ownership as men often believed to have more need of an ID compared to women and because they were the heads of their households.
  - Communities are often unable to explain the relevant purpose, needs, benefits, and challenges of an ID to women, increasing their hesitancy.
  - Participants also stated that women often find it hard to travel to enrolment centres due to household responsibilities.

Usage challenges

The affordability of digital devices and accessing digital solutions remains challenging, reducing the interactability with the larger digitised ecosystem
  - Dr. Tessema mentioned that connectivity and personal ownership continue to hinder rural communities' access to digitised services. This also limits the flow of information through digital sources about usage of digital IDs to access state services.

- **Even after obtaining IDs, women equate ID possession and need when accessing specific essential services**
  - Ms. Nessri highlighted that accessing services like health insurance benefits often requires an active bank account which in turn requires a legal identity document. However, in the absence of said ID document, people are unable to open a bank account and access the downhill services.
  - Mr. Gelalcha, mentioned that to commence income-generating activities, women need a state-provided ID to access microfinance schemes and benefits. Similarly, inability to leverage the relevant ID often inhibits women and disincentivises them from pursuing such activities.

Challenges
That Impact All 3 Pillars

Accessing relevant information for the larger ID system

Lack of relevant information often impacts women across the Awareness, Access, and Usage categories, severely impacting interactions for women and reducing trust and reliability with the entire system, and possibly with the larger ecosystem of digitised services. Several participants indicated that women's experiences with ID systems are often disrupted due to a lack of information to help understand:

- The need and benefits from obtaining a digital ID
- The process, journey, and timeline of enrolment, obtaining the digital ID, and using the digital ID
- The logistical details around registration centres, essential service centres, and authentication centres
- The required documentation to obtain digital IDs
- The required ID documentation to access essential services.

This lack of relevant and accessible information gives rise to various other challenges. For example, missing or incorrect details about registration or service centres can raise various planning and logistical challenges for women who may not have easy access to nearby centres.

Role of intermediaries

Using the learnings from Professor Janaki's session, the participants spoke about the role of intermediaries and the impact that they had on systems. Participants shared insights about their interactions with intermediaries, how they engage and enable said intermediaries, and the feedback loop that they strengthen. However, due to the variety of intermediaries that exist, the presence of intermediaries could either facilitate or hinder the experience of users.

- **At the awareness level,** intermediaries fill a crucial information gap. At the hyperlocal level, vendors or community leaders are a singular source of information for larger communities and can share relevant information about ID usage and can influence community level behaviour to overcome inhibiting societal norms. Alternatively, intermediaries could also function as gatekeepers to this information and diminish interest in obtaining IDs at the onset.

- **At the access level**, depending on the formality, intermediaries can function as facilitators for pre-registration, the registration process, and share information about leveraging relevant benefits or services using an

ID. For instance, participants mentioned that community leaders often aid citizens in their journey to registration centres by providing relevant information and overcoming logistical constraints.

- **At the usage level**, intermediaries can play the role of facilitating essential service provision, sources to update information, and provide information about the landscape of welfare schemes and benefits available to women. Participants from the ISC referred to the ASHA and Anganwadi worker network in India, that provide vital information, increase the ease of access for accessing essential services, and share vital feedback with service providers with data and information for more curated assistance.

Impact of socio-normative constraints

Socio-normative practices, norms and structures often play a crucial role in enabling and empowering women. In the presence of socio-normative constraints that inhibit women's interaction, challenges exist across all three pillars of the framework, further amplifying existing societal challenges or raising new challenges.

- **At the awareness level**, participants noted the existence of digital gender divide often caused by varying levels of digital and educational literacy. While access to such education differs in varying contexts, understanding the role of family and community to enable access is crucial.

- Participants noted that depending on the family and community dynamics, women often rely heavily on their families to facilitate interactions **when accessing** crucial elements of the ID system. For example, participants noted that male family members often control ownership over relevant identity documents and logistical pathways to access ID system elements. Furthermore, women's household responsibilities often impose logistical constraints significantly impeding their ability to access enrolment centres.

- **At the usage level,** availing state services through digital ID might often require multiple interactions with various elements while communities may discourage women from engaging frequently with unfamiliar intermediaries, travelling to distant locations, and monitoring digital usage. Similar impositions like this could create further hesitancy to use services that are enabled by digital IDs.

Practices shared by participants to address identified challenges

Participating entities engage with communities in varying capacities and collectively cover a large spectrum of interaction mechanisms with marginalised communities. By developing specific programs, or by fine-tuning specific operational components of these programs, participating entities shared some practices that they have incorporated into their day-to-day practices.

- Mitigating the information asymmetry and providing accessibility of the resources
  - Members from EWEA offer programs and provide resources to communities about the digital ID value chain.

- Facilitating the enrolment procedure for the internally displaced communities
  - EWEA helps people above the age of 18 who have migrated to Addis to enrol for the national ID.

- Making enrolment centres more accessible for vulnerable populations
  - To make registration centres more accessible, NIDP leverages bank networks and other such entities to increase accessibility through co-location strategies.

- Strengthening communities to address resource constraints
  - NIDP also engages with community leaders to identify and address women's challenges with missing or incorrect documentation.

- Collaborating with different stakeholders to address the enrolment challenges
  - NIDP collaborates with other government agencies like the Health Ministry and other financial institutions to enrol individuals.

- Facilitating users of digital IDs by adding intermediaries
  - NIDP is in the process of engaging with easily accessible service providers to facilitate citizens' usage of digital IDs once they get enrolled.

Conclusion

With the launch of the second virtual session of the COP, the ISC hoped to dive deeper and unpack specific challenges associated with accessing digital ID systems. The sessions helped deepen the community's understanding of the topic, while also sharing potential practices that could be incorporated by ecosystem actors. The **key learning** from these sessions was that while challenges emerge from specific elements of the system, stakeholder touchpoints, and interaction mechanisms, some key barriers often impact the larger value chain and journey taken to leverage a digital identity. These challenges might impact said interactions in varying capacities, different magnitudes, and at different times.

Finally, the community participants, keynote speaker and the ISC also identified and articulated the function, utility, and necessity of acknowledging, and incorporating a wide variety of intermediaries into the user journey.

Next Steps

The next session

The COP Virtual Session 3 will be held in December and would like to welcome participants to get in touch with the ISC at kunal@aapti.in. The ISC invites participants to present their work during the session, pertaining to thematic areas of the COP. Please refer to the concept document to help frame the presentation.

Feedback on the awareness, access, and usage framework

Based on the framework presented during the session, the ISC is in the process of consolidating key challenges and global practices that address the challenges when women interact with digital ID systems. The ISC would kindly request any interested entities to share suggestions and feedback with kunal@aapti.in. Please refer to the framework here when sharing these inputs.

Connect the ISC with relevant entities and organisations

As part of this initiative, the ISC strives to bring more relevant voices and learnings to the forum. We kindly request if participants could extend the COP invitation to other entities (researchers, non-profits, community-based entities, etc.) working in the thematic areas pertaining to the COP. In case you are unable to connect us, the ISC would also appreciate receiving the names of such entities to establish communication. The introductions could be done over email through kunal@aapti.in.

Relevant resources for the microsite

The ISC will be publishing this event readback, along with other resources (recordings, existing research, etc.) emerging from these virtual convenings on the dedicated microsite.

**For more information, visit
https://inclusion.aapti.in.**