the
Inclusion Hub

**EVENT
READBACK**

Virtual Session 3
Community of Practice: ID
23rd January 2024

**Understanding the nuances
of gender inclusion in digital
ID systems: Observations
from the field**

Powered By   **MOSIP**   aapti institute

Index

About the event

As part of the Community of Practice: ID Initiative (COP), a **third 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 3rd virtual session of the COP was hosted on the **23rd of January 2024 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 - 4:30 PM

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 3rd virtual COP event

Attendees from the Initial Steering Committee (ISC):

- Mr. Rohit Ranjan Rai (MOSIP)
- Mr. Kunal Raj Barua (Aapti)
- Ms. Mousmi Panda (Aapti)
- Mr. Shiv Chhatrala (Aapti)

Participating members for the Third Virtual Session of the COP: ID

- Dr. Tessema Bekele (Emmanuel Development Association - EDA)
- Ms. Feven Bulbula (National ID Program - NIDP)
- Ms. Krisstina Rao (Co-develop)
- Ms. Sylvia Garde (Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development - FIT-ED)
- Mr. Henok Aregay (Digital Opportunity Trust - DOT)
- Mr. Navendiran Navaprasanth (Chrysalis)
- Ms. Vasudha Varadarajan (Aapti)

We thank all the participants for joining the third 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 meetings. We hope that this note concisely encapsulates the third virtual meet and the sessions within.

Executive Summary

The third virtual event of the Community of Practice (COP) centred on understanding the nuances of women's interaction with digital ID systems. The event highlighted cross-organisational learnings around women's barriers and enablers observed from field observations, work of the organisations, and community interactions of the COP members.
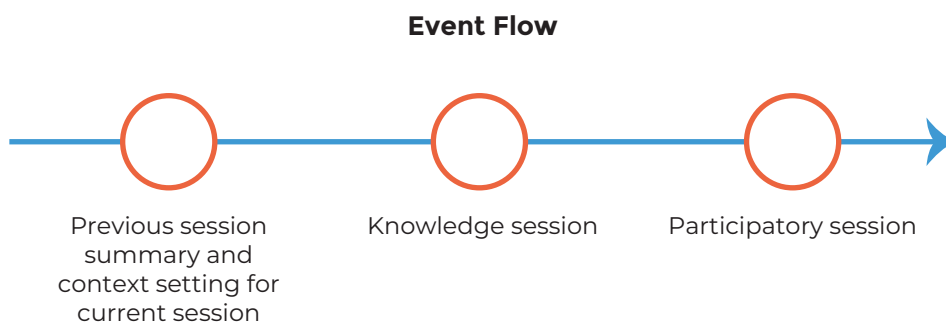
The Knowledge Session (KS), led by Aapti team, focused on articulating the rationale and process behind the **Awareness, Access, and Usage (A2U)** framework and explored the cross cutting challenges across that emerged in rural and urban geographies. The team also shed light on the various enablers that had been observed that constituted of interventions that enable women's access to information, enablement during the registration process, and enabling better access to services.

The Participatory Session (PS) encouraged the members of the COP to share their insights and learnings from their work and the consolidation of experiences from the ground. The participating members also highlighted the existing enablers and their impact to make digital IDs more accessible.

This event also announced that the 4th session of the COP will be convening in person in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the sidelines of the MOSIP Connect event and requested its members and participants to join in person if possible.

Event Agenda

The third virtual event of the COP started with the summarisation of the first and second event. It was followed by a knowledge session on the theme **"Understanding the nuances of gender inclusion in digital ID systems: Observations from the field"**. The event closed with a participatory session with the COP participants.

Event Flow

| Previous session summary and context setting for current session | Knowledge session | Participatory session |

Purpose of this readback

This readback encapsulates the insights, learnings, and discussions from the third COP event. It covers the key takeaways from the findings of Aapti team (during the KS) and consolidates attending members' observations (from the PS). This document hopes to be an asset for practitioners interested in the thematic areas of gender inclusion through and in critical digital systems or looking towards building similar communities of practice.

Context of COP 3

When interacting with digital ID systems, the experiences of marginalised population groups vary across geographies and other intersectional categories. With the continued adoption of digital technologies for service provision, it is essential to understand both the user and system side challenges to build robust systems.

While there are various enablers in place to improve women's access to digital IDs, these enablers are often underutilised due to a lack of visibility and awareness Therefore, initiatives and research that shed light on understanding the barriers and roles of different stakeholders in strengthening access are crucial for ID developers, deployers, and other key ecosystem stakeholders to leverage an ecosystem or network approach. Learnings from this COP hope to influence meaningful system design and recognise the informal enabling mechanisms in place.

In this context, the COP convenes key actors, such as researchers and research organisations, community-based entities, and other relevant actors, to strengthen

evidence building that is needed for the ecosystem. The third event of the COP initiative hoped to focus on understanding various barriers across the A2U framework that impede women's access to digital IDs and enablers present in different forms that try to address these challenges for easy access to digital IDs. The objective of the event was to facilitate meaningful discussions and bring forth diverse perspectives that can aid existing enablers and help inform system design.

Knowledge Session

The knowledge session (KS) was led by the Aapti team where they presented their observations from the field. Their learnings focused on understanding women's experiences while interacting with digital ID systems in rural, peri-urban, and urban settings from a global perspective. During field exploration, the team interacted with female ID users, visited registration centres for observations, and engaged with various intermediaries. These intermediaries included formal actors like centre operators, semi-formal actors such as worker network, and informal actors like last-mile actors and private vendors authorised by system deployers - to understand their role in the ID ecosystem. This session revolved around discussing two topics:

1. Emerging challenges and enablers observed in the rural field explorations
2. Emerging challenges and enablers observed in the urban field explorations

Emerging challenges and enablers observed in the **Rural** field explorations

Impact of information barrier

Field work revealed that the availability of information, and the asymmetries caused by it, are a prominent feature across the three pillars of the previously highlighted A2U framework. The research posited that information plays a crucial role in understanding the need and purpose of digital IDs, understanding registration processes, and the effective usage of digital IDs for availing essential services.

At the awareness level, women often face challenges in accessing information due to limited personal access or shared ownership of digital devices within their families – that could be caused by a difference in income levels, both within the family in terms of gender roles as well the income divide between urban and rural settings, or societal norms that influence behaviour at the family level. However, women's access to information through the television and newspapers in local languages continues to act as an enabler for obtaining information.

In rural areas, there was a lack of standardised information provided by registration centre operators and active community champions regarding various aspects of ID. Furthermore, interactions with users revealed that women frequently depend on informal intermediaries while accessing and navigating the registration process. Due to the context of this issue, such a concern is often addressed through collaborative efforts between system and community side actors. These actors collectively contribute to community understanding by developing their own informational materials and distribute them in high-footfall

locations like printing shops, registration centres, and town/village entrances.

At the usage level, the team observed that gender norms play a significant role determining the frequency and usage of digital IDs. This could emerge due to a lack of information about how to use foundational IDs, which ID to use, and the understanding of schemes that use these ID. In some cases, centre operators provided information about ID processes, while different countries establish context specific approaches to establish communication channels with its citizens. The inability to make informed decisions and to meaningfully interact with such systems often arises from the absence of reliable, standard, and accessible information, an area where women could benefit from if credible authorities with reliable information intervened in some capacity.

In various instances, it was observed that women who appeared more informed about ID systems and processes, typically engaged with such systems for specific purposes. These purposes could range from wanting to legally prove their identity or proving credibility for children to access educational loans etc. While multi-pronged interventions could benefit women's usage, provision of relevant, credible, and accessible information were key levers that enabled women's agency and decision making.

Impact of resource and logistical constraints

Dependability and functioning of registration centres can vary depending on the system or actors responsible, or that sometimes act independently, within that area. Uninformed changes, such as closed or relocated centres affect the logistical planning of women. Additionally, the presence of inhospitable centres forces women to seek alternate access mechanisms, resulting in additional financial and logistical costs.

To counter these challenges, ID authorities often leverage existing infrastructure for registration related work. Instances of existing infrastructure used for deploying different services or schemes (such as education or healthcare centers) are usually governed by other government authorities or other access providers.

Within the registration centers, the flexibility and operational decisions of centre operators played a key role for end users. Center operators were found relocating registration processes to areas with higher footfall, thereby addressing specific community needs.

Challenges associated with **accessing** foundational IDs had some correlation to the absence of pre-existing documents or other identity credentials, thereby impeding women's access to essential services. Family members frequently serve as enablers in this context, as women often depend on them to access such resources. Additionally, women seek assistance from informal intermediaries at the community level to navigate the registration process or when obtaining necessary documents.

The lack of interoperability within digital systems at the service provision level adversely affects women's experience when **using** foundational IDs. The team identified cases where biometric systems and service provision systems failed to match the person to their ID. As a result of these mismatches, women often had to undertake an additional ID level update, warranting a return to registration centers, creating additional resource spends.

To address this challenge, centre operators, hyperlocal intermediaries often help women by advising and accepting optional or additional documents. The roles played by various intermediaries could work towards improving women's access and usage of ID systems. While family and community members are key for decision making, intermediaries play as significant a role within communities to strengthen women's decision making.

Impact of socio-normative constraints

Societal and normative structures often determine the nuances of women's interactions within their communities. In various cases, the presence of unfavourable or androcentric structures often stymied women's engagement with digital systems.

It was observed that the presence of hyperlocal, regional, and national norms played a significant impact on women's agency and ability to interact with ID systems. Invisibilised household responsibilities, informal employment, varying levels of educational or digital literacy are some of the reasons that women's continued interaction within their communities and with critical services are hampered. Validated from field level insights, women's ownership over digital devices, financial resources, and decision making (both individual and at the household level) were also varied across various rural contexts. While the A2U framework sheds light on the various factors that impact women's access to digital IDs, a case could be made that the impact of family and community support, or lack thereof, contribute to various access related challenges.

At the **usage** level, even when possessing some form of identity credentials, decision making on how to use either IDs or identity credentials were influenced, if not made, by male family members on women's behalf, reducing women's agency. Interactions indicated that women users commonly use IDs for access to informal settings such as community festivals.

The role of an ID system might play a limited role to address specific normative challenges, however interventions put in place by deployers could reduce the magnitude and costs of decision making. For example, we saw that centers with women operators often had more women registering for their IDs independently. It should be noted that such interventions could help reduce the frictions that might exist from a socio-normative lens, but that behavioural change could require a much more collaborative approach and time.

Emerging challenges and enablers observed in the **Urban field explorations**

In urban settings, challenges encountered by women may vary compared to rural settings due to differences in women's literacy levels, their capacity to negotiate with ID systems, and the presence of different actors within urban settings.

Impact of information barrier

When discussing challenges observed in the urban settings, observations revealed that women are often **unaware** about implications that may occur by registering with incorrect credentials. In some cases, women used their family member's credentials, such as contact numbers while enrolling for foundational ID, creating another checkpoint when obtaining information. To address this challenge, formal intermediaries often act as reliable information sources, where many women initially visit registration centers to seek information about document requirements, processes, and charges, with the intention of returning later to enrol themselves.

At the level of access, lack of information about digital systems hinders women's abilities to make informed choices and to act independently. Observations in urban settings indicate that women lack confidence when **accessing** ID-related services. Urban environments or infrastructure often serve as an enabling factor, facilitating increased access to information points for women due to a networked approach of service centres or intermediaries. For instance, in urban settings, it was observed that informal intermediaries were situated in the proximity of residential areas and allow for easier access to information.

Women users often lack awareness regarding the implications of ID theft, misplacement of ID credentials, and data breaches. They also lack guidance on the steps to follow if they encounter such challenges after obtaining their ID, or to access grievance redressal channels, potentially impacting their ability to **use the ID** when accessing services. In such circumstances, last-mile actors, including family and community-level actors, as well as members of CSOs/NGOs/CBEs play a crucial role in guiding women on the necessary steps forward.

While some challenges remain similar in the rural and urban settings, what type of information was needed changed. For example, rural areas saw more of logistical and operational based questions, where urban settings required more information on the potential implications of theft and misuse. If information packages were crafted, prioritising the type of information could differ depending on the geographical context, a note that could be helpful for communication teams of ID deployers.

Impact of resources and logistical constraints

Even with the presence of ID authority centres in urban areas, registration was not always guaranteed or more efficient. It was observed that women frequently incur resource and logistical costs to identify, locate, and visit relevant registration centres, especially when accessing services or schemes.

There is often a strict requirement for specific types of pre-existing IDs or documents to change or update credentials on foundational IDs. Without these specific documents, women are forced to initiate a parallel registration process to obtain the necessary documentation, resulting in additional time and financial resources being expended. In such situations, increasing flexibility in document requirements could serve as a facilitator, enabling women to interact with the system more meaningfully. **At the usage level**, multiple visits to service centres to avail specific services can burden resource management and logistical planning for women.

Even with more infrastructure in place, women in urban areas face the accumulated effect of added resource costs. The cost of being digitally aware and literate, the ability to access specific solutions, and the ability to problem solve are often invisibilsed in urban areas, assumptions that often works to the disservice of women. With more efficiency expected in urban settings, the time available to seek information, or times of service center operators are often low. To address such challenges, the team observed the presence of various organisations that worked towards providing physical spaces to access digital devices, handholding to access platforms and solutions, and sharing information to allow more independent decision making, becoming a one-stop-shop for various needs.

Impact of socio-normative constraints

In urban areas, societal norms differentially impact the access and usage of digital ID. For example, if a woman is employed, she may have more of a reason to get an ID, but that ID is sometimes managed and controlled by male family members. In cases where, women are informally employed are unemployed, constraints at the level of obtaining ID are observed. In cases where welfare or financial support is required, women are often encouraged to obtain identification, however the levers around this identity are controlled by family members.

The team observed that a woman's need for an ID is often determined by its purpose, often disincentivizing informally employed women from obtaining any form of ID. To navigate such nuances, attempts to create demand for ID through access to women specific welfare services often encourage informally employed women to obtain an ID. Due to lack of digital literacy and knowledge about using ID for accessing services, women's usage of ID is often low.

Information dissemination, community efforts, and on-ground programmatic

interventions in place by NGOs/CSOs are often observed to overcome some behavioural change. While some interventions seem to improve women's agency, efforts still seem to be at a surface level. In many cases, women continue to be hesitant to use their ID when accessing emergency services, financial products, and so on.

Like rural settings, the role of ID deployers could be limited here, however putting in place systems within official centers, strengthening communication strategies, leveraging community champions could help strengthen credibility and connection.

Closing the knowledge session

While these observations were made in various countries, analysing interactions provided an understanding of socio-normo-political impacts that impact both geographical contexts in similar and differential ways. Various context based barriers and enablers could be seen as similar, however, identifying these challenges and creating pathways for mitigation require deep expertise in that country's context. Aapti's final research report highlights the specific differences observed in different countries that are on differing stages of their digital ID journey or maturity.

Participatory Session

The Participatory Session focused on consolidating COP participants' insights on various barriers and enablers in place with respect to the A2U framework, and the role that various members play. The purpose of this session was to elaborate on the multitude of challenges encountered by women in their ID journey, as well as to identify various enablers addressing those challenges that could be shared with a global audience.

Awareness:

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ENABLERS
• **Ms. Feven Bulbula (NIDP)** highlighted that it is often difficult to reach rural communities or remote areas, further perpetuating an information asymmetry. She mentioned that most women remain unaware about ID systems, often hindering their adoption and limiting their access to services. • **Mr. Navaprasanth (Chrysalis)** stated that proximity played a key role when implementing dissemination strategies. Due to the isolated nature of various rural communities, Sri Lankan authorities are often unable to engage with remote areas.	• **The NIDP** has focused on providing information through both formal channels like media, and informal channels, like leveraging community champions and religious leaders to disseminate information at the grassroots level. • In Sri Lanka, authorities have been using various forms of media and targeted communication strategies to reach out to remote areas, as mentioned by **Mr. Navaprasanth.**

A lack of incentives:

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ENABLERS
• **Ms. Bulbula** shared that a lack of incentives for ancillary institutions serving as registration points in Ethiopia, may lead to inefficiencies in the administration of such systems.	• **The NIDP** provides incentives to different intermediaries playing a role in the ID value chain through a referral based approach • **Ms Bulbula** also shared NIDP's distribution strategy for physical IDs by collaborating with Ethio-post to use the postal service for registration. • **Mr. Henok Aregay (DOT)** shared with the forum the role that community led inclusion can play a key role to enable women.

Adopting digital technologies:

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ENABLERS
• **Mr. Henok** stated that many rural communities, particularly in countries like Ethiopia, exhibit resistance in adopting digital technologies.	• **Mr. Henok** suggested individuals who are already familiar with digital technologies, such as university students and teachers should be leveraged, to disseminate information about the latest digital advancements to rural areas.

Accessing registration processes:

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ENABLERS
• Public service points are distant from rural areas, due to which communities face logistical challenges in accessing registration centres.	• **Mr. Henok** state that registration agents often aimed to reach remote communities. ◦ Further using urban points like city centres to display information could be considered as people from rural parts visit these urban points.

HIGHLIGHTED CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL ENABLERS
	• **Mr. Rai (MOSIP)** suggested that digital systems could support major and minor languages to make information, and systems more largely, more accessible. ◦ He also suggested leveraging alternative registration process such as registration via mobile phones, temporary registration sites, and offline registration in areas with limited infrastructure.

Conclusion

With the closure of the third virtual session, the ISC aimed to delve deeper into and unpack specific challenges and enablers associated with accessing digital ID systems. The sessions facilitated unpacking the nuances of the identified problem statement for this event, while also sharing potential practices that ecosystem actors could draw from. A key takeaway from these sessions was the recognition that challenges faced by urban and rural settings have similarities, but differ, often necessitating customised non-technical solutions. Addressing factors that enable women's access in rural areas, could see some impact in urban areas, and vice-versa, however, ensuring that the solutions apply specifically requires intersectional understanding of context. From this takeaway, a case could be made about a deeper intersectional understanding should be developed that helps create even more customised ways of approach. Lastly, community participants and the ISC identified challenges at different touchpoints in women's journey of obtaining and using IDs, and their corresponding enablers, the summaries of which will be consolidated for global ecosystem stakeholders to draw from.

The ISC also used this forum to announce that the fourth session of this COP would be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, alongside the MOSIP Connect event to facilitate more in-person conversations with key members.

Next Steps

The COP Session 4 will be held on the **6th of March 2024 in Addis Ababa** on the sidelines of the MOSIP Connect event 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 convenings on the dedicated microsite.

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